

## 6 Being Born and Giving Birth

Usually, when a traditional Muslim mother gives birth to a son people rejoice. Most cultures have similar celebrations, but usually, in the West, we celebrate the birth of both girls and boys. In most of the Middle East, parents often celebrate a new son with fireworks or the firing of rifles. However, the birth of a new daughter rarely gets the same attention among traditional Muslims and often, other groups.

The Quran speaks of some of this inequity in the following verses. Before the revelation of the scripture, pagan Arab life revolved around warfare among the various tribes. Many of these same basic attitudes have carried over into modern times. Let's look at the first set of verses and then at their modern parallel:

*When one of them gets a baby girl, his face becomes darkened with overwhelming grief.*  
(Quran: The Final Testament 16:58)

*When one of them is given news (of a daughter)... his face is darkened with misery and anger! (They say,) "What is good about an offspring that is brought up to be beautiful, and cannot help in war?"*  
(Quran: The Final Testament 43:17-18)

I just mentioned that even now most traditional Muslims do not celebrate the birth of a daughter. If you could read the minds of today's fathers their excuse has probably become that a daughter cannot help in the family business rather than in war raids, but the essential emotion and its expression remains much the same as that of 1400 years ago; the human psyche has remained basically the same.

The next verse tells of the horrifying way in which the pagan Arabs often dealt with their unwanted daughters:

*Ashamed, he hides from the people, because of the bad news given to him. He even ponders: should he keep the baby grudgingly, or bury her in the dust. Miserable indeed is their judgment.*  
(Quran: The Final Testament 16:59)

God condemns this terrible practice again when speaking of the Day of Resurrection:

*The souls are restored to their bodies. The girl who was buried alive is asked: For what crime was she killed?*  
(Quran: The Final Testament 81:7-9)

Muslim parents rarely kill their unwanted newborns like this anymore, though as they grow girls often become emotionally and socially buried by traditional practices. The question in Verse 9 above still seems appropriate in these forms of "death".

Also, before an unborn baby girl reaches the age when abortion is illegal, often her mother will abort her. This seems very close to that pagan practice of killing girl

newborns and demonstrates the gender inequity many modern Muslim parents have towards their children.

Take for instance Pakistan—which the Guttmacher Institute <sup>1</sup> reports having the highest estimated rate of abortion in the world in 2012—where 50 per 1000 women of childbearing age abort their infants. This compares to 13 per 1000 in the United States in 2014.

What caused this high rate of abortion? From my experience working in the front office for a gynecologist originally from India, I can share that Muslim women, especially from the Indian and Pakistani cultures, often fear their husbands will divorce them if they do not give them sons. We had to refer patients to other caregivers to end their pregnancies because my boss, who followed the Quran as the basis of her life, would not perform abortions—especially since she knew both scientifically and from the Quran that the husband actually determines the gender of the child:

*He is the One who created the two kinds, male and female—from a tiny drop of semen.*  
(Quran: The Final Testament 53:45-46)

Some Muslims claim the soul does not enter the body until later in the pregnancy and so, in their understanding, the Quran allows early abortions. However, I strongly disagree because of the following verse:

*God puts the souls to death when the end of their life comes, and also at the time of sleep. Thus, He takes some back during their sleep, while others are allowed to continue living until the end of their predetermined interim ...*  
(Quran: The Final Testament 39:42)

If their argument held together then killing someone in their sleep would not break God's law, because He "*puts the souls to death*" when they sleep. That makes no sense.

Muslims do not have a monopoly on the preference for sons. Among the Children of Israel at the time of Jesus' mother Mary, parents sometimes dedicated a son to God to work in His temple. This verse on the birth of Mary demonstrates such a dedication:

*When she gave birth to her, she said, "My Lord, I have given birth to a girl" — God was fully aware of what she bore—"The male is not the same as the female. I have named her Mary and I invoke Your protection for her and her descendants from the rejected devil."*  
(Quran: The Final Testament 3:36)

Verse 3:35 tells us Mary's mother dedicated her to serve God while she was still in the womb. Because normally boys were dedicated to God she may have been unsure if God would accept her daughter. But in Verse 3:37 God did accept her, showing us again that He sees females as equal to males. So women should not object to the gender God

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<sup>1</sup> More information can be found at their website:

<https://www.guttmacher.org/report/abortion-worldwide-2017> (last accessed 03/14/2021).

the Omnipotent and Omniscient Creator chose for their babies, no matter what their society teaches them about the inferiority of women.

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*Many women have experienced giving birth and many have been with other women as they gave birth.*

*For many years I people called me Iman. Here I as Iman share my experience of being present at a home birth attended by non-nurse midwives.*

### **A Home Birth**

At one point in my life, many years ago, I acted as the secretary for a school of non-nurse midwives. One day when I came into the office, which occupied an old storefront in a little plaza of shops, a team of midwives bustled around getting supplies they needed to go to assist a woman give birth in her home. One of them, I think it was Sandy,<sup>2</sup> turned to me and said something like, “You have never been to a home birth have you?”

Actually, I had been in the house when one of the founders of the school, Narmeen, had her baby. But I had not actually been in the same room, so I hoped Sandy might invite me along.

She phoned the expectant mother and checked if I might join the team when they went to assist her. Thankfully she said yes and fulfilled my wish!

I quickly checked to be sure nothing urgent waited for me in my in-box, and then I called Narmeen to make sure I could leave the office unattended for the time that remained in my shift. Having obtained permission, I became ecstatic. I had long hoped for this opportunity.

I helped the second midwife—Agnes—load the van and then I hopped into the back. Off we drove to a cute little green-painted home near the university of the town we lived in.

I helped unload the van and Sandy introduced me to the expectant parents. They invited us to come in and have some peppermint herbal tea in their comfortable kitchen. As we sat around the wooden kitchen table, Agnes went and checked the mother to see how far along she was in her labor.

Her waters had broken before they called the midwives and it was not long then before the baby started crowning. Suddenly everything got very hectic, and Sandy asked the mother’s sister Joan and me to stay out of the way until we were called. So we stayed in the kitchen until Agnes called us into the bedroom. The baby was mostly out of the birth canal by then. With one final push, this new little girl’s mom pushed her out into the world.

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<sup>2</sup> Just so you know, I have changed people’s names because I don’t know how to contact them for permission to mention them

It was one of the most magical things I have ever been blessed to witness! Even now, after all these years, as I am writing of it I have goose bumps on my arms and my eyes work not to tear up at the wonder of that moment. The moment when God brought a new soul into the world using that lovely team of young women who devoted their lives to helping parents have their children at home.

This experience gave me first-hand understanding of the Quran's Verse 22:5 where it says:

*O people, if you have any doubt about resurrection, (remember that) we created you from dust, and subsequently from a tiny drop, which turns into a hanging (embryo), then it becomes a fetus that is given life or deemed lifeless. We thus clarify things for you. We settle in the wombs whatever we will for a predetermined period. We then bring you out as infants, then you reach maturity....*

I pray that I never forget that blessing to me. And I pray to always remain conscious of the One who is in control of everyone's birth, their life, and their death.

—Iman, U.S.A.

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*Often we may be uncertain how the birth of a girl will be received in a Muslim home. And sometimes that reception will be a surprise as it was in Lydia's next story.*

### **Having a girl**

Soon after I came into Submission (Islam), a young couple from India visited us at the Mosque. They'd been married only a year or so and you could see the happiness that they shared. While visiting with us, Shabina discovered that she was pregnant. She shyly told us one morning at a Quran study, and we were all thrilled for her. Her husband, Kais, beamed with pride.

After they went back home, we kept tabs on the progress of the pregnancy. When the time came to give birth, Kais called to tell us it was a girl. I remember worrying about what his reaction would be. Most men want a son, and this seems especially true in traditional Islamic culture. There's the feeling of wanting someone to carry on the name, someone to grow up and follow in his father's footsteps. It almost seems to be the measure of the man if he has a son. But a daughter?

I needn't have worried. The excitement in his voice when he told us the news, the joy he conveyed when he spoke of how absolutely beautiful she was. It was clear he was totally smitten. He was thrilled to have a daughter. There was no hesitation in his expression of love for her, not the slightest hint that he was in any way disappointed.

Another girl followed three years later and the joyful response of the parents was the same. People asked Kais if he was disappointed that it wasn't a boy. He was

disappointed in people's mindsets. He thought a child is a gift from God so how can people be concerned with what gender God wants that gift to be.

While they first planned to have just two children, Kais always liked the idea of three. He saw it work beautifully with other friends and relatives who had three. When Shabina was pregnant with their third child, Kais told me that people started saying that he desperately wanted a son. Most of this came from people of the traditional mindset who wanted sons. Their third child was a boy, but the joy Kais and Shabina felt was not in his gender but in the fact that he was healthy, just like his big sisters.

The three children have grown into beautiful young adults who follow the Quran and worship God alone. All three received the same level of education and got equal support to pursue their independent careers. But family remains their foundation and support. They are confident, happy people. This was made possible by the love and acceptance of both parents, given equally to the girls and the boy. This is a blessing from God.

We all know that if we have no baby girls in the world, then we'll have no mothers in the future. God chooses what each couple conceives: *[13:8] GOD knows what every female bears, and what every womb releases, or gains. Everything He does is perfectly measured.*

And if they rejoice in it, then He will reward them.

—Lydia, U.S.A.

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Above, I shared one of my experiences with birth at home when I worked with a group of non-nurse midwives many years ago. Now when I think about the miracle of how an individual grows from two cells, the mother's egg and the father's sperm, I am quite overwhelmed by the whole system God has provided for our reproduction. To me, it is quite miraculous and gives me a deeper understanding of why He calls life sacred.

This chapter also contains my views on abortion and Quranic verses supporting those views. The following verses give another proof of the seriousness of non-natural abortion:

*You shall not kill your children due to fear of poverty. We provide for them, as well as for you. Killing them is a gross offense.... You shall not kill any person-for God has made life sacred-except in the course of justice....*

*(Quran: The Final Testament 17:31 & 33)*

I believe I personally participated in the miracle of conception only once. The pregnancy ended after just a couple of weeks in a miscarriage. But during that time I felt another being within me. In fact, I think I may have felt the child at or shortly after conception. Though I wanted children very much, God probably blessed me by allowing

the miscarriage, as my husband did not want children and left when he learned of the pregnancy.

A while after this experience my life changed direction in a very positive way. I now see that if I had not miscarried, raising the child by myself would not have allowed me to experience some of the most important events of my life.

God knew best then, as He always does for us all.