

## **IRAN MUST STOP DEATH BY STONING**

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Iran, with its misnomer of “Islamic Republic”, has again defied human rights and passed a sentence of stoning for individuals charged with committing adultery. Iran is following neither universal human rights nor Islamic injunctions when they stone men and women.

As Islam shares similar teachings and traditions with Judaism and Christianity, including the same prophets and history, it is not surprising that morality issues are addressed in a similar manner. However there are differences, the Quran does not mention stoning for any transgressions, but the Old Testament does state stoning and death for adultery and sexual transgressions.

For example, in Deuteronomy 22:13, if a woman is not a virgin on her wedding night, the instructions are that “They shall bring out the damsel to the door of her father’s house and the men of her city shall stone her with stones till she die.” Or in Leviticus 20:10 “...the adulterer and the adulteress shall surely be put to death.”

The fascinating and important fact is that these Biblical injunctions are no longer upheld or practiced by Jews or Christians. For example, when Jesus was told about a woman who was charged with adultery, his humane response was, “Let him who is without sin, cast the first stone.”

Though stoning is not in the Quran, yet it is some Muslim majority countries which have assumed this cruel and harsh punishment as integral to Islam. I think this kind of “borrowing” from one religious tradition becomes part of another without people considering its origins.

For Muslims, the Quranic teachings are paramount, as it is believed to be the word of God. The secondary source for practical guidance and interpretations of the Quran is the teachings and practices of the Prophet Mohammad. However, an extremely important dictate is that nothing that the Prophet said or did can contradict the Quran. Another factor is that the Sayings of the Prophet, the hadith, were gathered a century or so after his death, and there is controversy amongst Muslims regarding the accuracy of some of the various collection of hadith.

For example, regarding the issue of stoning for adultery, there are about 3-4 cases recounted in the hadith. We can question if the reported cases did occur, because stoning for adultery is contradictory to the clear injunction in the Quran, and accruing such practices to the Prophet are highly suspect, as he would not have done anything against the word of God.

In the Quran, adultery is seen as destructive to a marriage and the family unit. However, there are strict guidelines as to how this would be defined in law with clear instructions

for the punishment. It is not taken lightly and the strict conditions are that the act of adultery has to be witnessed by 4 individuals before it is accepted as a transgression. The punishment is 100 lashes which blatantly contradicts stoning.

It is fair to raise the question as to whether issues such as adultery should be of state or public concern to be judged and punished by the state.

How do we decide which issues are only for the family to deal with while other matters are of interest to the all in a community? It is a delicate balance to ensure the welfare without over-interference in the family.

Pierre Elliott Trudeau's classic remark that "The state has no business in the bedrooms of the nation" was challenged by women. Too often it is in the bedrooms of the nation where there is violence and abuse against women and children, and the state does have a role in the safeguarding and protection of family members. Trudeau did not imply that abuse was acceptable but rather that adultery was not a matter of public concern.

Tragically in some cultures, the family is seen as part of the patriarchal structure. What this means is that women and children are the responsibility of the males who are to protect and provide for them.

The pride and honour of the family is tied to the behavior of all members of the family. The men bear the brunt of having to be the maintainers, while the women carry the burden of the family honour. Such importance is placed on family honour that families cannot be "shamed" and so adultery or any other such behaviour is to be condemned and punished, not only by the State but by the males of the family.

We know there is much anti Muslim prejudice in the West. We don't need this exacerbated when some Muslim majority countries insist that retrogressive practices are true Islamic ones. If the Prophet Mohammad could not contradict what is in the Quran, it is shameful that countries such as Iran take it upon themselves to slander Islam to justify their desire to instill fear in, and control of their people.

Amongst Muslims, there is healthy controversy along with some good critical discussion. For example, there is debate regarding issues, such as the legitimacy of an "Islamic state" or the critical study of the Quran as to its historical context and what comprises the eternal message.

A lot more work is essential to counteract some of the literalist and intolerant interpretations. The oil- fed wealth of some countries has currently stymied progress in critical thinking and analysis which was such a vital part of Islamic learning.

If there is shame, it is that other Muslim majority countries don't speak out against such travesties and don't demonstrate or uphold the compassion and justice of Islam.