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Everyday Values: Most Americans are Already Familiar with Islam's Sharia

"Like other faith communities in the US and elsewhere, we see no inherent conflict between the normative values of Islam and the US Constitution and Bill of Rights." (Fiqh Council of North America, 2011)

When Americans see the real Sharia — not the caricature put forth by too many politicians — they see an ordinary faith guiding ordinary people toward honesty, service, and community. As Islamic scholar Sherman Jackson wrote in 2010, sharia, "includes scores of moral and ethical principles, from honoring one's parents to helping the poor to being good to one's neighbor." That's not a threat to America. That is America's values.

Praying Regularly and Staying Grounded is Sharia

Muslims pray five times daily as a way to stay centered and grateful — much as many people of faith who pause for daily prayer or meditation. It's about discipline, gratitude, and connection to God.

"Indeed, prayer prohibits immorality and wrongdoing, and the remembrance of Allah is greater. And Allah knows what you do." (Quran 29:45)

Standing Up for What's Right is Sharia

At its heart, Sharia asks Muslims to "enjoin good and forbid wrong." In American terms, that's civic responsibility — speaking up when something's unjust, helping a neighbor, volunteering, or voting your conscience.

The Prophet said: "Whoever among you sees an evil, let him change it with his hand; if he cannot, then with his tongue; and if he cannot, then with his heart — and that is the weakest of faith." (Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim)

Doing Honest Business and Avoiding Exploitation is Sharia

Sharia forbids cheating in trade, charging interest or exploiting others. In modern terms, it's the ethical version of "do unto others."

The Prophet said: "The truthful and trustworthy merchant will be with the prophets, the truthful, and the martyrs." (Sunan al-Tirmidhī)

Fasting to Build Discipline and Empathy is Sharia

During Ramadan, Muslims fast from sunrise to sunset — not unlike many Christians during Lent. Fasting trains conscience and compassion, reminding the well-fed to care for the hungry — a moral discipline as old as humanity.

Islam's zakat system asks believers to donate a small portion of their income to help the poor — about 2.5%. Sound familiar? It's the same spirit that drives church tithing and charitable giving in America.

"O you who believe, fasting is prescribed for you as it was prescribed for those before you, that you may become righteous." (Qur'an 2:183)

The Prophet said: "Charity does not decrease wealth." (Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim)

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Reading Sacred Texts and Finding Peace in Prayer is Sharia

Personal devotion is the heartbeat of faith — reflection and remembrance that keep life anchored in meaning. Reciting verses from the Qur'an or saying short prayers throughout the day is simply a way to stay mindful. Many Americans of faith keep sacred verses close for the same reason.

The Prophet said: “The example of the one who remembers his Lord and the one who does not is like that of the living and the dead.” (Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī)

Dressing Modestly is Sharia

Muslims are encouraged to dress modestly — not unlike biblical teachings about modesty.

Children of Adam, We have given you garments to cover your nakedness and as adornment for you; the garment of God-consciousness is the best of all garments— this is one of God's signs, so that people may take heed. (Qur'an 7:26)

Fear-mongering about Sharia is not about protecting American values — it's about distracting people from noticing how many of those same values we already share.

Obeying the Law of the Land is Sharia

Muslims must obey the laws of the land in which they live, so long as those laws do not require them to engage in indisputably evil conduct. Various Muslim minorities in modern times and in historic times have lived and thrived as minorities in various societies, obeying the laws of the land while also following Islamic tradition in their personal lives. Muslim minorities obviously do not and cannot implement the aspects of Sharia that involve governmental action, such as criminal punishments, in a non-Muslim society.

Although Jews, Christians, Muslims and other people of faith can enter into private contracts, write last wills and testaments, use private arbitration, or draft business agreements that involve their religious teachings, such agreements, contracts, or other documents cannot be enforced by courts if they violate the law or U.S. public policy.

Bottom line: fear-mongering about Sharia is not about protecting American values — it's about distracting people from noticing how many of those same values we already share.

Additional Resources

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Sally Steenland and Intisar Rabb. “Setting the Record Straight on Sharia.” March 8, 2011. <https://www.americanprogress.org/article/setting-the-record-straight-on-sharia/>.

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