



Muslim Resources for the Children's Sabbath

In this section you will find a variety of resources to engage your mosque, Islamic center, or group in the National Observance of Children's Sabbaths:

- ◆ Suggested Activities
- ◆ Care for the Children of America: An Islamic Perspective
- ◆ An Islamic Perspective on Justice and Mercy on Behalf of the Vulnerable
- ◆ Materials for the Sermons and Discussions
- ◆ An Islamic Prayer for Public Events on Care for Children

Be sure to read a Muslim Perspective by Sophia Kizilbash and Afeefa Syeed in the Faith Voices section on page 56.

Lesson plans for all ages will be available to download from www.childrensdefense.org/childrenssabbaths after August 15, 2008.

Suggested Activities

- 1. A Friday sermon on the vulnerability of children and the urgent need to care for them.** Material provided here in addition to other materials from the Qur'an, Sunnah, Islamic law and biography of early Muslim generations can be used to illustrate the care given to children. One great story is that of the second great rightly guided caliph Omar when he declared that infants and children must be given allowances like adults in order to allow their parents to provide adequate care for them.
- 2. An evening or weekend congregational event** where parents and children who lack proper care, adequate education, or health insurance can speak to the community in order to raise awareness among members of the Muslim community.
- 3. A public and community-wide forum organized by the Islamic center or the Muslim community** in which experts on child poverty, childhood hunger, housing and homelessness, health care, health insurance, and school districts, and public officials can attend to provide information on existing resources and, at the same time, direct the public on productive ways of activism to change existing public policies and commit themselves to helping in these noble tasks.
- 4. A gathering of various ethnic and religious groups to raise awareness and commit themselves to producing the necessary and desirable change.** The Muslim representative can read the Islamicly based public prayer written by Dr. Ahmed Nezar Kobeisy included in this section.

Care for the Children of America: An Islamic Perspective

By Dr. Ahmed Nezar Kobeisy, Iman and Director at the Islamic Center of the Capital District

Generally speaking, children are the most precious, yet vulnerable, most innocent, yet fragile, of all age groups. The future of any nation depends greatly on how that nation educates, treats, and nurtures its children. Due to the unique position and role of the United States in the world as the sole superpower, not only the future of the United States but also that of the world will be greatly affected by the way American children are educated, nurtured, and treated today. Although the United States is the most advanced in the world industrially, scientifically, and militarily, among other things, statistics on children are not encouraging. A great percentage of American children are left in poverty, in harmful environments, and without adequate nourishment, health care, or education.

To illustrate:

In poverty:

- Every 35 seconds a child is born into poverty.
- Today, there are 1.2 million more children living in poverty than there were in 2000, an increase of 11 percent.
- Children under the age of five remain more likely to be poor than older children.
- Every year that 13 million children live in poverty costs the nation \$500 billion in lost productivity.

In health care:

- There are 9.4 million uninsured children in America.
- Every day more than 2,100 children are born without health insurance.
- Every two minutes a baby is born at low birthweight.

In education:

- Every 10 seconds during the school year a student drops out.
- Only 14 percent of Black, 17 percent of Latino, and 42 percent of White 4th graders are reading at grade level.
- States spend on average almost three times as much per prisoner (\$22,650 a year) as per public school student.

In harmful environment:

- Every 36 seconds a child is confirmed abused or neglected.
- Every three hours a child or teen is killed by a firearm.
- In 2006, the United States' inmate population of more than 2,300,000 exceeded China's, whose general population is more than four times as large.
- On any given night, 200,000 children are homeless.

Muslim Resources for the Children's Sabbath

The Qur'an describes children's condition as that of vulnerability, weakness, and need.

The Qur'an states:

هُوَ الَّذِي خَلَقَكُمْ مِنْ نَرَابٍ ثُمَّ مِنْ نُطْفَةٍ ثُمَّ مِنْ عَلَقَةٍ ثُمَّ يُخْرِجُكُمْ طِفْلًا ثُمَّ لِتَبْلُغُوا أَشَدَّكُمْ ثُمَّ لِيَكونُوا شُيُوخًا وَمِنْكُمْ مَن يُتَوَفَّى مِنْ قَبْلُ^ط وَلِتَبْلُغُوا أَجَالَ مُمَسَّى وَلَعَلَّكُمْ تَعْقِلُونَ ﴿١٧﴾

Which translates to:

It is He who has created you from dust then from a sperm drop, then from a leech-like clot; then does he get you out (into the light) as a child: then lets you (grow and) reach your age of full strength; then lets you become old—though of you there are some who die before—and lets you reach a Term appointed; in order that ye may learn wisdom. (Qur'an 40:67)

Islam commands mercy when dealing with children and considers the way children are treated as the measure of mercy. In an authentic narration, while a man was sitting with the Prophet (peace be upon him), a child came to the Prophet, so the Prophet held and kissed him. The man asked: "Do you kiss your children? I have ten children but I've never kissed any of them." The Prophet replied: "What help I can offer to you if Allah has deprived your heart of mercy?"

This narration explains the great attention that the Qur'an gives to the care for orphans and the reward promised for treating them like one's own children.

The Qur'an states:

وَيُطْعِمُونَ الطَّعَامَ عَلَى حُبِّهِ مِسْكِينًا وَيَتِيمًا وَأَسِيرًا ﴿٨﴾

Which translates to:

And they feed, for the love of Allah, the indigent, the orphan, and the captive. (Qur'an 76:8)

The Prophet (p.b.u.h.) states that which means: "I and the one who cares for the orphan in Paradise are as near as these two fingers" (while holding the index and the middle fingers).

The Qur'an forbids mistreatment of orphan children:

فَأَمَّا الْيَتِيمَ فَلَا تَقْهَرْ ﴿٩﴾

Which translates to:

Therefore, treat not the orphan with harshness. (Qur'an 93:9)

In Islam, children who are not orphans but weak, vulnerable, and deprived should be no different. The Orphan in Islam refers to the child who lost his/her father (i.e., the breadwinner for the family). There are many children whose parents are both alive but who still can be described as "orphans" due to the lack of adequate care in various aspects of life from negligence, ignorance, or inability in the face of difficult circumstances. They are weak and vulnerable without an adequate family income, or food, or health care, or housing, or safe and nurturing care.

A Muslim poet states what could be translated to the following:

The true orphan is not the one whose father or mother has passed away and left him behind.

The true orphan is the one whose mother has become negligent or whose father has become inattentive.

Of course, many parents are trying to do the best they can for their children, yet face insurmountable challenges of unaffordable housing or health care, unavailable child care and jobs that pay a living wage, lack of job training and transportation, and all kinds of other obstacles. Despite their best efforts, these circumstances leave their children as vulnerable as the orphans we are instructed to protect, and to them, too, we must offer our care and concern.

It is the duty of every Muslim, male and female, young and old, to change the unfair and unhealthy circumstances of children of our societies and consequently of our nation. Muslims are urged to display the mercy of Islam for the vulnerable and the care for the future of our nation and for that of the world by working hard to bring this issue to the attention of the public and to the public policy makers, by raising the awareness among Muslims of the plight of children in the United States and of the need to change such conditions, and by collaborating with their fellow citizens of various religious and non-religious groups to change such oppressive and unhealthy conditions of children.

An Islamic Perspective on Justice and Mercy on Behalf of the Vulnerable

Adapted from "An Islamic Perspective on the Uninsured," prepared for Cover the Uninsured Week by Ahmed Nezar Kobeisy, Ph.D.

According to Qur'anic stipulations, Islam is based upon and is aimed at the establishment of justice and mercy. Justice is the core value not only for Islam but also for all previous messages of God according to the Qur'an.

The holy Qur'an states:

لَقَدْ أَرْسَلْنَا رُسُلَنَا بِالْبَيِّنَاتِ وَأَنْزَلْنَا مَعَهُمُ الْكِتَابَ وَالْمِيزَانَ لِيَقُومَ النَّاسُ بِالْقِسْطِ وَأَنْزَلْنَا الْحَدِيدَ فِيهِ بَأْسٌ شَدِيدٌ وَمَنْفَعٌ لِلنَّاسِ وَلِيَعْلَمَ اللَّهُ مَنْ يَنْصُرُهُ وَرُسُلَهُ بِالْغَيْبِ إِنَّ اللَّهَ قَوِيٌّ عَزِيزٌ ﴿٢٥﴾

Which translates to:

"We sent aforetime our apostles with clear signs and sent down with them the Book and the Balance (of Right and Wrong), that they may stand forth in justice."
(Qur'an 57:25)

Justice means that all people are treated equally and that the value of a human being's health and life is not determined by the level of his/her wealth or status. Justice also requires that health care and services necessary for one's well-being and survival are not offered on the basis of how much the person has or what the person can afford. It is an Islamic duty as a step in the pursuit of justice to raise the awareness of the plight of children and families in need, and consequently, seek to bring about a change in public policies.

In order for justice to be achieved, it is the obligation of conscientious individuals and groups to be the voice of the voiceless, to help the helpless and advocate for those who do not have the means or the access to advocate for themselves.

Another basic principle and objective of Islam is mercy. The holy Qur'an describes the mission of Islam's Prophet Muhammad (p.b.u.h.) as mercy to all creatures and not only to humans.

The Qur'an states:

وَمَا أَرْسَلْنَاكَ إِلَّا رَحْمَةً لِّلْعَالَمِينَ ﴿١٧﴾

This translates to:

"We sent thee (O' Muhammad) not, but as a mercy for all creatures."

(Qur'an 21:107)

Our beloved prophet (p.b.u.h.) states that which means: "The one who does not show mercy, will not be shown mercy," and states, "Show mercy to those who are on the earth, you will be shown mercy by the one who is above the Heavens."

There are many ways to show mercy to Allah's creatures, including feeding, clothing and sheltering, and providing health care.

Islam commands Ihsan (kindness and excellence) as a virtue to characterize each and every action in our lives. Ihsan, or excellent treatment, can include loving for others what a person loves for him/herself or even giving others preference over one's own self. Prophet Muhammad (p.b.u.h.) states what translates to: "None of you shall attain to full faith until he/she loves for his/her brother or sister what he/she loves for him/herself." He also states: "He/She who loves to be moved away from hell and admitted to Paradise, must not die until he/she is in a state of faith in Allah and the Last Day and must do unto other people what he/she loves others do unto him/her."

The Qur'an states:

﴿إِنَّ اللَّهَ يَأْمُرُ بِالْعَدْلِ وَالْإِحْسَانِ وَإِيتَايَ ذِي الْقُرْبَىٰ وَيَنْهَىٰ عَنِ الْفَحْشَاءِ وَالْمُنْكَرِ وَالْبَغْيِ يَعِظُكُمْ لَعَلَّكُمْ تَذَكَّرُونَ ﴿١٥﴾﴾

Which means:

"Allah truly enjoins justice and Ihsan (kind and excellent treatment)."

Prophet Muhammad (p.b.u.h.) states that which means: "The creatures of Allah (i.e., humans) are the children (i.e., liability and responsibility) of Allah and the most beloved to Allah are those who show kind and excellent treatment to His children."

It is hard to imagine a person who claims to be just, merciful and kind who, after becoming aware of the injustice, humiliation and suffering of millions of children, does not work to change such conditions and alleviate such sufferings.

The steps to change this injustice are to become aware yourself, spread awareness among friends and colleagues, and advocate to public officials and representatives for the cause.

Materials for the Sermons and Discussions

From the holy Qur'an and the Sunnah of the Prophet (p.b.u.h.):

Use verses that assert the honor and dignity which Allah assigned to the human race, equality among all people, the essentiality of justice and standing for justice, the obligation to cooperate with everyone—Muslim or non-Muslim—on issues of justice and mutual good, the mercy of Islam and the kind treatment Muslims are required to give to the vulnerable and weak. Some illustrations are included below. Muslim leaders are encouraged to utilize the abundant sources in the Qur'an and Prophetic tradition to support the activities related to this program.

a. The nobility and honor bestowed on human beings

﴿وَلَقَدْ كَرَّمْنَا بَنِي آدَمَ وَحَمَلْنَاهُمْ فِي الْبَرِّ وَالْبَحْرِ وَرَزَقْنَاهُمْ مِّنَ الطَّيِّبَاتِ وَفَضَّلْنَاهُمْ عَلَىٰ كَثِيرٍ مِّمَّنْ خَلَقْنَا تَفْضِيلًا﴾ (v)

We have honored the children of Adam; provided them with transport on land and sea; given them for sustenance things good and pure; and conferred on them special favors, above a great part of Our creation.

(Qur'an 17:70)

b. Justice

﴿يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا كُونُوا قَوَّامِينَ لِلَّهِ شُهَدَاءَ بِالْقِسْطِ وَلَا يَجْرِمَنَّكُمْ شَتَانُ قَوْمٍ عَلَىٰ آلا تَعْدِلُوا أَعْدِلُوا هُوَ أَقْرَبُ لِلتَّقْوَىٰ وَاتَّقُوا اللَّهَ إِنَّ اللَّهَ خَبِيرٌ بِمَا تَعْمَلُونَ﴾ (a)

O ye who believe! Stand out firmly for Allah, as witnesses to justice, and let not the hatred of others to you make swerve to wrong and depart from justice. Be just: that is next to piety: and fear Allah. For Allah is well-acquainted with all that ye do.

(Qur'an 5:8)

c. The Islamic obligation to support just causes regardless of religious affiliation

﴿لَا يَنْهَىٰكُمْ اللَّهُ عَنِ الَّذِينَ لَمْ يُقَاتِلُواكُمْ فِي الدِّينِ وَلَمْ يُخْرِجُواكُمْ مِّن دِيَارِكُمْ أَن تَبَرُّوهُمْ وَتُقْسِطُوا إِلَيْهِمْ إِنَّ اللَّهَ يُحِبُّ الْمُقْسِطِينَ﴾ (a)

Allah forbids you not, with regards to those who fight you not for your faith nor drive you out of your homes, from dealing kindly and justly with them: for Allah loveth those who are just.

(Qur'an 60:8)

d. The mercy of Islam and kind treatment required

﴿إِنَّ اللَّهَ يَأْمُرُ بِالْعَدْلِ وَالْإِحْسَانِ وَإِيتَايِ ذِي الْقُرْبَىٰ وَيَنْهَىٰ عَنِ الْفَحْشَاءِ وَالْمُنْكَرِ وَالْبَغْيِ يَعِظُكُمْ لَعَلَّكُمْ تَذَكَّرُونَ﴾ (a)

Allah truly enjoins justice and Ihsan (kind and excellent treatment). Prophet Muhammad (p.b.u.h.) states that which means: "The creatures of Allah (i.e., humans) are the children (i.e., liability and responsibility) of Allah, and the most beloved to Allah are those who show kind and excellent treatment to His children."

An Islamic Prayer for Public Events on Care for Children

Our Creator, The Lord of Abraham, Moses, Jesus and Muhammad,

Our beloved God and Our Loving God,

We know Our Lord, Most Wise, that You Created humans purposely to proliferate on Earth, to reproduce and have children and for their children, when they mature and become responsible, to have children, and it is Your Grace which has allowed us to draw from this... an immense joy.

But, we also know that along with the pleasure you have graciously planted in our hearts, Our Lord, Most Just, You have placed on our shoulders a hefty responsibility. Deeply embedded in Your Divine Purpose, is our obligation to defend all that is weak, to nurture all that is vulnerable, to protect all that is innocent, to safeguard all that is fragile and to cherish all that is precious.

And who should know better than You, O' Lord, Who is Most Cognizant, that our children are all of these things?

So graciously, O' Lord, assist us in fulfilling our duties towards them so that they can grow up to be whoever they wish to become and we hope them to be.

Please shape us into the perfect examples for them to follow as they inevitably become the adults of tomorrow.

Our Lord, Most Forgiving, we are horribly ashamed of the way in which we failed You by failing our children.

Alarming statistics of hunger, deprivation, lack of adequate health care, and closed doors of opportunities deprive us of our humanity and civilization.

Daily images of children being abducted from their homes, raped, killed, and brutally mutilated rob us all of any sense of accomplishment.

Other children indicted and convicted as adults pass the conviction to all of our societal institutions.

We have foolishly let our greed, arrogance, and apathy get the best of us by letting these vices cloud our judgment and darken our hearts and souls.

So we ask You, Mighty Lord, to turn the eagerness of our greed into a spirit of selflessness so that we may give back to our children the innocence we so voraciously took.

Please turn our arrogance and false pride into humility and servitude so that we may rightfully nurture them the way they so deserve.

And Lord, Most Gracious, please turn our apathy and inertia into empathy and compassion so that we may change the tears we so wrongfully caused into smiles our children so direly need, and the cries we so unjustly provoked into giggles and laughter carried by the gentle breeze.

After all, until our children succeed and prosper, our hearts will know no peace... and torment will continue to replace the joy that once was.

Our Lord, help us learn the lessons from all that goes on around us.

Grant our members, religious leaders, city officials, public policy makers, and national caretakers the will, strength, resolve and wisdom to nurture, educate and support our children towards excellence in life, health, the opportunity to learn and virtue in values.

Guide our society members, officials, educators, and parents to join hands in preparing the children of today to become the peacemakers of tomorrow.

Help us make the world a safer place for them.