



M A S J I D
OF
L I F E

THE EARTH IS A MASJID.

POSITION PAPER

WHAT ISLAM ACTUALLY SAYS ABOUT WOMEN

SEPARATING DIVINE LAW FROM
CULTURAL RESTRICTION

PART I · IMAM YUSEF ISMAIL

03

RESEARCH. PRINCIPLE. JUSTICE.

THE MASJID OF LIFE

The Earth is a Masjid.



The Masjid of Life is a Qur'an-centered institution dedicated to cultivating individuals, strengthening families, building communities, and establishing institutions rooted in the guidance of Allah.

Its work brings scholarship into the practical realities of contemporary life—uniting education, public thought, entrepreneurship, community development, and institution-building. Revelation should not remain confined to theory; it should shape human character, social relations, economic life, and the institutions through which people live.

Our mission is to help cultivate communities where innocent people can thrive according to the guidance of Allah. Our aspiration is to become the world's leading Qur'an-centered think tank: an institution recognized for principled research, moral clarity, intellectual independence, and solutions capable of serving humanity.

These position papers are part of that undertaking. They address consequential questions with seriousness, clarity, and an unwavering commitment to justice before God.

CULTIVATING A QUR'AN-CENTERED CIVILIZATION



ABOUT IMAM YUSEF ISMAIL

Imam Yusef Ismail is the founder of the Masjid of Life, a Qur'an-centered institution dedicated to cultivating individuals, strengthening families, building communities, and establishing institutions rooted in the guidance of Allah.

His work bridges scholarship and practice, bringing together education, entrepreneurship, community development, and institutional leadership. He believes revelation should not remain confined to theory, but should shape every dimension of human life.

Alongside his educational work, he has built and continues to develop initiatives in real estate, foreclosure resolution, business consulting, and community-centered economic development. These experiences reinforce his conviction that meaningful change requires both sound ideas and strong institutions.

His mission is to help cultivate communities where innocent people can thrive according to the guidance of Allah.

SERVICE TO GOD. CLARITY FOR PEOPLE. INSTITUTIONS FOR LIFE.

READ A FREE SAMPLE

WHAT ISLAM ACTUALLY SAYS ABOUT WOMEN

Separating Divine Law from Cultural Restriction

About This Position Paper

This position paper separates divine guidance from cultural restrictions that have too often been presented as Islam. Drawing upon the Qur'an, the Prophetic community, Islamic history, and the evidentiary limits of transmitted reports, it examines women's participation in the masjid, professional life, leadership, gender interaction, customary greetings, travel, modesty, and communal responsibility. It rejects both cultural seclusion and the abandonment of moral boundaries, presenting a Qur'an-centered middle path of cooperation without compromise, spirituality without seclusion, and modesty without mistrust.

Questions Explored

- What vision of gender, modesty, and communal life does the Qur'an establish?
- How did the Prophet's masjid integrate women and men without erasing boundaries?
- Which restrictions arise from revelation, and which developed through later culture?
- How should disputed narrations be weighed against the Qur'an's controlling authority?

This preview introduces the Qur'anic and Prophetic model and concludes with women's principled participation in the Prophet's community.

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What Islam Actually Says About Women — Part 1

Note on the Structure of These Papers

This document is Part 1 of a two-part series:

Part 1: Separating Divine Law from Cultural Restriction.

Addresses communal life, masjid etiquette, interaction, boundaries, and prophetic proportionality.

Part 2 (Upcoming): Establishing Marriage Ties and Building Sacred Relationships

Will explore courtship, proposals, communal introductions, family involvement, modest interaction, and how masjids can facilitate Prophetic pathways to marriage without cultural extremes.

Allah ﷻ tells us in the Qur'an, Surah 7 [Al-Araf, الْأَعْرَافُ, The Heights], Ayah 31, which explains that the Masjid is a Communal Space:

يَبْنَى ءَادَمَ خُذُوا زِينَتَكُمْ عِنْدَ كُلِّ مَسْجِدٍ وَكُلُوا وَاشْرَبُوا وَلَا تُسْرِفُوا ۚ إِنَّهُ لَا يُحِبُّ الْمُسْرِفِينَ ۝ ٣١

O Children of Adam! wear your beautiful apparel at every time and place of prayer: eat and drink: but be not excessive. Indeed, He likes not those who commit excess.

The Qur'anic command “وَلَا تُسْرِفُوا” (wala tusrifu), “do not be excessive”, and the description “الْمُسْرِفِينَ” (al-musrifin), “those who commit excess”, come from the root س-ر-ف, which means to go beyond proper limits, to waste, or to let blessing turn into imbalance. Classical commentators note that this prohibition extends beyond overeating to include excess in clothing, self-display, spending, or any behavior in which blessing becomes vanity, waste, or arrogance. By pairing “eat and drink” with a command to avoid excess, Allah indicates that the masjid is not a place of withdrawal but a place of communal life, where families gather, relationships are cultivated, and ties are strengthened through presence, hospitality, and shared blessing. In this verse, **Allah establishes a principle of balance within the communal space of the masjid: present yourselves with dignity and beauty, enjoy His provision, but do not cross into extravagance, pride, or wastefulness**, for He “does not love those who commit excess.

Introduction — The Intent of the Creator

Every masjid is meant to mirror the intent of its Creator, a space where divine purpose is made visible in human conduct. The Masjid of Life exists to embody that vision: a living model of balance, mercy, and mutual respect, where every man and woman stands as a servant of Allah ﷻ and a guardian of light. Our mission is not merely to preserve tradition, but to **restore proportion**, to realign culture with revelation, and to cultivate environments that reflect the wisdom of the Qur'an and the compassion of the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ.

Across centuries, Muslim communities have struggled to balance faith with changing social realities. Many inherited customs that restrict what Allah never forbade, while others, reacting to that rigidity, abandoned the discipline of modesty that He commanded. The result has often been tension and confusion, not between men and women alone, but between culture and revelation.

The Masjid of Life seeks a middle path rooted in the Prophetic model:

- cooperation without compromise,
- spirituality without seclusion,
- and modesty without mistrust.

Our goal is to cultivate masjids, classrooms, and communal spaces that **reflect the intent of the Creator, Allah ﷻ**, where both men and women fulfill their purpose as vicegerents upon the earth, guided by the Qur'an and the Sunnah in the light of mutual dignity and respect.

The Modern Experience: A Split Between the Masjid and Daily Experience

Gender roles and interactions between men and women have long been a source of discussion and, at times, conflict within Muslim communities. For some, especially newcomers to Islam or lifelong Muslims navigating modern contexts, the environment of the masjid can feel very different from their daily lives.

In the workplace, men and women often collaborate on projects, attend meetings together, share lunch breaks, and interact in professional and social settings. In public life, from shopping and traveling to studying, interaction between genders is a routine occurrence. Yet, when they enter certain masjid environments, they may find strict separation, with men and women not even seeing one another until after leaving the facility. This contrast can create discomfort, particularly for women, who may feel that the masjid environment does not reflect the reality of their broader lives.

The central question, then, is this: **What aligns with Allah's divine law, the example of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him), and the precedent in Islamic history regarding gender interaction?** And how do we distinguish between what is divinely mandated and what is cultural practice?

The Qur'anic Restoration of Woman's Personhood

The Qur'an did not emerge into a moral vacuum; it entered a world in which a woman's humanity was often diminished by custom and class. In pre-Islamic Arabia, female infants could be buried alive in the name of honor. Allah ﷻ tells us in the Qur'an, Surah 81 [At-Takwir, التَّكْوِيرُ, The Overthrowing], Ayat 8–9:

وَإِذَا الْمَوْءِدَةُ سُئِلَتْ ۙ
بِأَيِّ ذَنْبٍ قُتِلَتْ ۙ

*When the female (infant), buried alive, is questioned –
For what crime she was killed;*

Women were also treated as property within the inheritance system, and few could claim independent ownership or legal standing. Revelation overturned these injustices by affirming women as full moral agents before God and society; the Qur'an restored their personhood, dignity, and rights.

The Qur'an affirmed their independent spiritual worth: “Never will I allow to be lost the work of [any] worker among you, whether male or female; you are of one another.” (Qur'an, Surah 3 [Ali Imran, آلِ عِمْرَانَ, The Family of Imran], Ayah 195). It codified her economic and legal rights, granting inheritance shares (Qur'an, Surah 4 [An-Nisa, النِّسَاءُ, The Women], Ayat 7 and 11–12), the right to contract and own property (Qur'an, Surah 4 [An-Nisa, النِّسَاءُ, The Women], Ayah 32), and the ability to testify and seek redress in court (Qur'an, Surah 24 [An-Nur, النُّورُ, The Light], Ayat 6–9). **The Prophet ﷺ, following the**

commands of Allah, implemented these reforms in both word and practice, recognizing women as individuals accountable before God, capable of choosing faith, engaging in commerce, and contributing to the public moral life of the ummah. In this way, Islam established a true model of *women's empowerment* rooted in *faith, dignity, and justice*, centuries before such ideals became the language of modern reform, anchoring her worth not in tribe or status, but in *taqwa*, God-consciousness.

The Prophetic Model - Mecca and Medina

When the message of Islam first dawned in Mecca, society was stratified and wealth concentrated among a few tribes. Muhammad ibn Ishaq ibn Yasar (مُحَمَّدُ بْنُ إِسْحَاقَ بْنِ يَسَارٍ, born approximately 85 AH/704 CE in Madinah; died 150 AH/767 CE in Baghdad), an early Medinan biographer of the Prophet ﷺ, preserved accounts of that society in his Sirah. Its best-known recension was prepared by Abd al-Malik ibn Hisham al-Himyari (عَبْدُ الْمَلِكِ بْنُ هِشَامِ الْحِمْيَرِيُّ, a Basran-born philologist and biographer whose birth year is uncertain and who died 218 AH/833 CE in Egypt) as al-Sirah al-Nabawiyyah (السِّيَرَةُ النَّبَوِيَّةُ, The Prophetic Biography).

Migration to Medina transformed that social order. Medina was an agrarian society, meaning a farming community where men and women worked together to plant, harvest, and trade. Abu Abd Allah Muhammad ibn Sad al-Baghdadi (أَبُو عَبْدِ اللَّهِ مُحَمَّدُ بْنُ سَعْدٍ الْبَغْدَادِيُّ, born 168 AH/784 CE in Basrah; died 230 AH/845 CE in Baghdad), an early biographer and hadith compiler, records this social world in Kitab al-Tabaqat al-Kabir (كِتَابُ الطَّبَقَاتِ الْكَبِيرِ, The Book of the Major Classes), one of the earliest biographical compendia concerning the Prophet ﷺ and his Companions. The Prophet ﷺ and his Companions entered a culture in which women's participation was visible and valued. They worked in the fields, traded in the markets, tended the wounded, and sought knowledge in the masjid.

Umar ibn al-Khattab (رضي الله عنه) described the contrast vividly:

“By Allah, in Mecca we did not consider women as having anything until we came to Medina and found that the women of the Ansar had the upper hand over their men. So our women began to learn from their ways. I was once angry with my wife, and she retorted to me. I was astonished and said, ‘You dare reply to me?’ She said, ‘Yes, by Allah, the wives of the Prophet ﷺ reply to him, and some of them may even shun him for a whole day until the night.’”

Sahih al-Bukhari, Kitab al-Nikah, Hadith no. 5191; Sahih Muslim (variant wording).

This narration shows that the Prophet ﷺ did not suppress the social activities of Medinan women. Their **assertiveness** did not threaten revelation; **it matured within it**. The Messenger of Allah ﷺ allowed each culture to function within its natural norms so long as faith, dignity, and respect were preserved.

Aishah (رضي الله عنها) praised these women for combining modesty with eagerness to learn:

“How excellent are the women of the Ansar! Modesty did not prevent them from seeking knowledge of their religion.”

Sahih Muslim, Book of Menstruation (Kitab al-Hayd), Hadith no. 332

Likewise, Jabir ibn Abdullah (جَابِرُ بْنُ عَبْدِ اللَّهِ, a Medinan Companion of the Prophet ﷺ) recounted an incident demonstrating women's ordinary economic mobility. When his maternal aunt was rebuked for leaving home during her waiting period to harvest her date palms, the Prophet ﷺ told her:

“Certainly, go and harvest your date palms, for perhaps you may give charity or do an act of kindness.”

Sahih Muslim, no. 1483, Kitab al-Talaq (كِتَابُ الطَّلَاقِ, The Book of Divorce), chapter permitting a woman observing a waiting period to go out during the day for a need.

Women in Medina also joined congregational prayer. Ibn Umar (رضي الله عنهما) reported:

“The wives of the Prophet ﷺ used to attend Fajr prayer with him, wrapped in their outer garments, and then they would return home unseen because of the darkness.”

Sahih al-Bukhari, no. 578, Kitab Mawaqit al-Salah (كتاب مواقيت الصلاة, The Book of the Times of Prayer); Sahih Muslim, no. 645, Kitab al-Masajid wa Mawadi al-Salah (كتاب المساجد ومواضع الصلاة, The Book of Mosques and Places of Prayer).

And the Prophet ﷺ explicitly instructed the men of his community:

“Do not prevent the female servants of Allah from going to the mosques of Allah.”

Sahih Muslim, Kitab al-Salat (The Book of Prayers), Hadith no. 442, and in Sahih al-Bukhari, Kitab al-Jumuah (The Book of Friday Prayer), Hadith no. 900.

These sahih narrations reveal that the Prophet ﷺ did not create barriers between men and women; he created boundaries of respect. Women’s presence in worship, trade, and learning was not only accepted but affirmed as part of the healthy life of the community. The reports themselves document public participation governed by faith and dignity rather than categorical exclusion.

The Qur’an confirmed this balance, revealing verses in Medina that addressed a socially active female population, affirming equal spiritual worth while refining public conduct. Allah ﷻ says in the Qur’an, Surah 33 [Al-Ahzab, الْأَحْزَابُ, The Confederates], Ayah 35:

إِنَّ الْمُسْلِمِينَ وَالْمُسْلِمَاتِ وَالْمُؤْمِنِينَ وَالْمُؤْمِنَاتِ وَالْقَانِتِينَ وَالْقَانِتَاتِ
وَالصَّادِقِينَ وَالصَّادِقَاتِ وَالصَّابِرِينَ وَالصَّابِرَاتِ وَالْخَاشِعِينَ وَالْخَاشِعَاتِ
وَالْمُتَصَدِّقِينَ وَالْمُتَصَدِّقَاتِ وَالصَّائِمِينَ وَالصَّائِمَاتِ وَالْحَافِظِينَ فُرُوجَهُمْ
وَالْحَافِظَاتِ وَالذَّكِرِينَ اللَّهَ كَثِيرًا وَالذَّكِرَاتِ أَعَدَّ اللَّهُ لَهُمْ مَغْفِرَةً وَأَجْرًا عَظِيمًا

٣٥

For Muslim men and women, - for believing men and women, for devout men and women, for true men and women, for men and women who are patient and constant, for men and women who humble themselves, for men and women who give in Charity, for men and women who fast (and deny themselves), for men and women who guard their chastity, and for men and women who engage much in Allah's praise, - for them has Allah prepared forgiveness and great reward.

This verse anchored equality not in social preference but in shared devotion. **In the Prophet’s ﷺ lifetime, this spiritual parity produced a community where faith and cooperation, not isolation, defined modesty.**

Women’s Participation in the Prophet’s ﷺ Campaigns

While armed combat was never made obligatory for women in Islam, neither were they barred from serving beside the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ in the defense and welfare of the Muslim community. The Prophet ﷺ recognized that service takes many forms, and he welcomed the contribution of women whose skills and devotion strengthened the believers.

Anas ibn Malik (أَنَسُ بْنُ مَالِكٍ), a Companion from Madinah who served the Prophet ﷺ and later lived in Basrah) reported:

“The Messenger of Allah ﷺ used to go on expeditions with Umm Sulaym and some women of the Ansar. They would give water to the soldiers and treat the wounded.”

Sahih Muslim, Kitab al-Jihad wal-Siyar (The Book of Jihad and Expeditions), Hadith no. 1810.

Likewise, Umm Atiyyah (رضي الله عنها) said:

“I went out with the Messenger of Allah ﷺ on seven expeditions. I would stay behind in the camp, cook food, treat the wounded, and care for the sick.”

Sahih Muslim, no. 1812g, Kitab al-Jihad wa-al-Siyar (كتاب الجهاد والسير, The Book of Jihad and Expeditions).

These two narrations, drawn from the most rigorously classified hadith collections, establish that women’s participation in the Prophet’s ﷺ campaigns was regular, permitted, and respected. Their service helped sustain the army.

At times, necessity called for more than care. When danger pressed upon the Messenger ﷺ, women also rose in defense. During the Battle of Uhud, (أُمُّ عُمَارَةَ) Nusaybah bint Kab (Umm Umarah) (رضي الله عنها) fought with sword and bow to protect him. The early historian Ibn Sad records:

“Wherever I turned, to the right or left, I saw Umm Umarah fighting in front of me.”

Kitab al-Tabaqat al-Kabir (كتاب الطبقات الكبير) by Ibn Sad, Volume 8, page 415.

When the Prophet ﷺ saw her wounds, he exclaimed,

“From where can anyone endure what you have endured, O Umm Umarah!” and prayed, “May Allah bless you and your household.”

Kitab al-Tabaqat al-Kabir (كتاب الطبقات الكبير), The Book of the Major Classes) by Ibn Sad, volume 8, in the biography of Nusaybah bint Kab; and Ibn Hisham’s al-Sirah al-Nabawiyyah (السيرة النبوية, The Prophetic Biography), in the account of the Battle of Uhud.

Her valor became legendary, demonstrating that when circumstance demanded, women were not forbidden from bearing arms, and their courage was honored by the Prophet ﷺ himself.

At the same time, the Prophet ﷺ defined moral boundaries for war, safeguarding women from harm. Abdullah ibn Umar (رضي الله عنهما) reported:

“A woman was found killed in one of the battles, so the Messenger of Allah ﷺ forbade the killing of women and children.”

Sahih Muslim, Kitab al-Jihad wal-Siyar (The Book of Jihad and Expeditions), Hadith no. 1744b

These statements establish a clear ethical order:

- women could volunteer to serve, even fight in self-defense, but they were never to be targeted or coerced into combat.
- Islam protected their dignity while affirming their agency.

Together, these hadiths reveal a balanced prophetic model, one that **neither romanticizes fragility nor demands imitation of men.**

The Prophet ﷺ created a framework of **participation with principle**: every believer, male or female, served according to ability, and all were bound by mercy and discipline. **In that generation, modesty was not seclusion.**

THE ARGUMENT CONTINUES

Continue Reading

The complete position paper examines:

- Women, work, professional life, leadership, and public moral agency
- The historical movement from participation toward seclusion
- Gender interaction, handshakes, customary affection, and travel
- The Masjid of Life's guiding middle path

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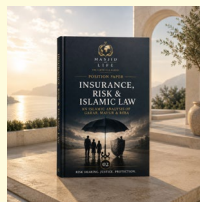
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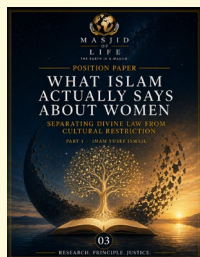
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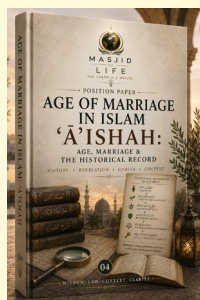
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WHAT ISLAM ACTUALLY SAYS ABOUT WOMEN

Separating Divine Law from Cultural Restriction

Part I



AGE OF MARRIAGE IN ISLAM

History, Law & the Case of Aishah

Research. Principle. Justice.