



Islam and Slavery

Introduction

What comes to your mind when you hear the word slavery? Is it someone who's in chains, with iron collars around their necks, who gets beaten, who barely gets enough food to eat, and who lives in harsh and filthy conditions? While this may have been how slavery was in many civilizations, including America, this certainly is not how slavery was in Islam. When we think of slaves in Islam, our minds should understand a very different concept of slavery than the American slavery we may be used to hearing. We as Muslims know that Islam is the greatest supporter of human rights. Therefore, as Muslims we should understand how Islam has *improved* society, including the practice of slavery.

Before we learn

Before discussing this topic in more detail we should understand a few things *regarding slavery*. Firstly, slavery was a universal practice which was wide-spread and common across all cultures in the past. Slavery was allowed and accepted in Christianity and Judaism well before Islam. Secondly, we *cannot* base the Islamic concept of slavery on our understanding of Western slavery. Both are *completely* different! In order to accurately understand Islam and slavery, we must understand how and what slavery was before modern times. Judging a concept based on two different contexts will always lead to confusion.

Islamic slavery in context

The question of why Islam permits slavery is a common question that both non-Muslims and even some Muslims have. To answer this question, we should first remember that when Allah permits or forbids something, there is wisdom behind it, whether we understand that wisdom or not. Secondly, just because Islam *permits* something doesn't mean that it necessarily *encourages* that thing. For example, just because Islam *permits* divorce, doesn't mean that Islam *encourages* divorce. Similarly, just because Islam

permits slavery, doesn't mean that it *encourages* slavery. In fact, the opposite is true. Islam encourages the freeing of slaves, not keeping them. There are many verses of the Quran and Prophetic narrations which encourage, and often even require freeing a slave to fulfill a form of worship.

The Prophet ﷺ encouraged his followers to treat slaves kindly and gently. In this way, the slaves were made to feel wanted; which was far better than treating them as property and leaving them to be poor and unsupported in society, as was common in other societies.

Slavery in Islam vs Slaves in the West

Slaves in America were never considered human beings, rather they were considered property. Masters could treat their slaves however they wanted, often beating them senselessly and forcing them to do difficult and dangerous work. These people were captured and forced into slavery, often taken from another country or a different ethnic group. There wasn't necessarily a war involved.

In Islam, the relation between slave and master is more of a brotherhood¹. Islam, through its concept of tawhid, eliminated the concept of humans being slaves to one another, and instead turned humans into slaves of Allah². Slaves were treated with respect, and worked on tasks which weren't too difficult or burdensome. Masters were commanded by the Prophet ﷺ to give the slaves the same food they ate. Furthermore, only those captured in battle became slaves, and that too was only if there was no better option available.

What is the benefit to slavery in Islam?

Prisoners of war had nowhere to go, no way to make money, so making them slaves allowed them to join society and have their basic needs taken care of. They would also have the potential to be freed. These prisoners were never ill-treated nor tortured by their Muslims masters. Islam is the only religion with laws to treat prisoners kindly and humanely. Muslims needed to keep these prisoners of war for future wars, to strengthen Islam,

and keeping them as slaves was an ideal way of sustaining and protecting them. Many slaves, due to kind treatment from their masters, even became Muslim! In other non-Islamic civilizations, prisoners of war were slaughtered, instead of being allowed to live. If they were permitted to live, they would live in harsh and miserable conditions as slaves.

Conclusion

To summarize, the concept of slavery in Islam cannot be compared to the slavery that we think of, such as the horrific slavery that was in America. If we were to compare the harsh concept of Western slavery to Islam, we would see that Islam basically abolished, or ended the cruel treatment of slaves. In fact, Islam created a different system, where the slaves could eventually become free and have their own wealth. Islam has always been the religion that has improved human civilization the most. As Muslims we must look past what others say negatively about Islam, and try to understand the beauty and wisdom of Islam for ourselves.

References (linked to source)

1. [Sahih al-Bukhari-30](#)
2. [Sahih Muslim- 2249](#)
3. [Can You Explain the Concept of Slavery in Islam? -SeekersGuidance](#)
4. [Mufti Shafi Uthmani- Maariful Quran- Slavery -Surah Muhammad](#)
5. [6 key points on Islam's teachings on Reqaab and Jariyaat & the Muslim response to Western criticism of Islam & Slavery -Abdullah al Andalusi](#)
6. [The Problem of Slavery and viewing Islam through a Western lens -Abdullah al Andalusi](#)

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