

# **The Equity Of Recompense: The Hereafter In The Qur'an: *Qur'an And Woman* (1992)**

by

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## **Abstract**

In this article, the final part of man's existence referred to in chapter three of *Qur'an and Woman* (1992) is discussed. Equity within gender framework is announced as the overarching theme. Wadud's discussion in this chapter "centers on one question regarding this beautiful and impressive verbal display: Is there an essential distinction between the women and men in the Qur'anic portrayal of the hereafter?" The discussion of the paper will be done in accordance with subdivisions and subsections provided in *Qur'an and Woman* (1992), with the addition (3.2.1.12) of the subdivision, "Selected Features of Chapter Three of *Qur'an and Woman*" (1992). Attention will be given to untitled preliminary remarks made by Wadud at the beginning of the chapter.

**Key words: Equity, Quran, women, recompense, Hereafter**

## **Introduction**

Introducing chapter three of *Qur'an and Woman* (1992), Wadud (1992:46) mentions about the portrayal of the Hereafter, "The Qur'an uses the most vivid description and dynamic language". Furthermore, she refers to the Qur'an's "beautiful and impressive verbal display". She states, however, that her objective would be to find an answer to the question, "Is there an essential distinction between women and men in the Qur'anic portrayal of the Hereafter?"

### **3.2.2. The Hereafter and Creation**

Wadud, firstly compares the Qur'anic accounts of the Hereafter and Creation, respectively. According to Wadud (1992:44), the discussion of the hereafter and creation differ in that in the Qur'an the creation "is discussed with few details" whereas "the hereafter is discussed at length." The latter cannot, according to Wadud, be accepted at face value. She states,

“However, some of the elaborate descriptions of Paradise with regard to gender will need considerable attention”.

### **3.2.3. Values and the Hereafter**

In the introductory verses quoted by Wadud (1992:45), she draws attention to Qur’anic verses emphasizing that the Hereafter is preferable in time, quality, and reality than the present compensation. They are Q, 87:17 (“The hereafter is better [*kair*] and longer lasting [*abqā*], Q. 93:4 (The hereafter is better than [*kair*] for you than the first [*al- ūlā*]).

Then she compares earthly life and the Hereafter with respect to three focus points. Firstly, Wadud juxtaposes brief (Q. 13:26) and enduring (Q. 18:46) enjoyment. Secondly, mixed pain and pleasure of earthly life contrasted with the presumed total pleasure characteristic of the Hereafter. Finally, Wadud typifies earthly life as deceptive, while “The Hereafter presents *the reality*.” When referring to Q. 93:4 and 13:26, Wadud (1992:59<sup>4-5</sup>) cites al-Zamakhshari.

In addition to the verses mentioned above, Wadud also draws attention to other Qur’anic passages differentiating existence on earth and the Hereafter. They are <sup>3</sup>Q. 25:24, 7:169, 16:30, 17:21 and 87:15 (Wadud 1992:59<sup>3</sup>).

### **3.2.4. Stages of the Hereafter**

After the introductory subdivisions (3.2.2 and 3.2.3), attention is given to the “Stages of the Hereafter”. Wadud (1992:45) refers to “Death, Resurrection, Judgement, and finally Heaven or Hell. She does, however, admit that the said stages are “not distinguished into comprehensible terms chronologically.” Wadud also refers to an incoherency seen from the perspective of the known world. She says: “[T]his incoherency of time is understandable” (1992:45).

Stages of the Hereafter that are discussed are Death, Resurrection and Judgement.

#### **3.2.4.a. Death**

Concerning death, Wadud (1992:46) draws attention to the use of the term *nafs* in Q. 3:185 and other verses (cf. 1992:59<sup>8</sup>) which state that each *nafs* will taste of death. Wadud speaks of the relationship between death and gender. She says (1992:46):

[I]t is this term [*nafs*] that is used to elevate the Qur'anic discussions of recompense in the Hereafter above gender distinctions.

And, furthermore, as regard death itself Wadud (ibid.) states:

Thus, death is inevitable for all humans (male and female), and [they are] distinct only based on the quality of one's deeds and consciousness.

### 3.2.4.b. Resurrection

The “day of resurrection” is characterized by Wadud (1992:47) as “a disruption of the order of reality which we have known and lived.” She adds (ibid):

However, there is one familiar aspect: the *nafs* is the vehicle that experiences this and all other events in the Hereafter.

Wadud (ibid.) quotes Q. 81:7 emphasizing the phrase *wa idā al-nufūsu zuwwijāt* which she translates as “and when the *nufūs* are paired.” She interprets the phrase by saying:

[O]n the basis of the most essential part of being, the *nafs* (here pluralized *nufūs*), we will be paired in groups or classes.

Here *zuwwijāt* (passive perfect feminine singular of *z-w-j* II) refers (1992:47) to the pairing “into groups and classes” of the *nufūs*. With *nufūs* (pl. of *nafs*) human beings are meant (cf. Lane; Wadud 1992:60<sup>11</sup>). According to Wadud (1992:47):

[T]he term *nafs* corresponds equally to the male and female human essence, which is the fundamental determinant of being, not gender, race, nationality, nor even religion.

Referring to the noun *nafs* in combination with the verbal form *zuwwijāt*, Wadud thus lays stress on the equity of classification particularly as regards male and female. However, it is important to note that many modern and classical commentators, for example al-Hilali and Khan (1993), who have commented on the verse, do not ascribe to the phrase any sociological meaning, they interpret *zuwwijāt* as referring to the joining of the soul and body on the day of resurrection.

### 3.2.4.c. Judgement

In her attempt to prove her point of gender equality, Wadud (1992:48) refers to the weighing on a scale of “all deeds of every individual”. She emphasizes (ibid.):

From *nafs* to *nafs* (from individual to individual) the scales on the day of judgement will be the same.

Several verses are quoted to illustrate the various dimensions of judgement, namely that each person will surely be tried (*b-l-w* I; cf. Q. 3:185-186 and 5:48), that Allah “knows what is secret and what is manifest” (Q. 10:61 and 2:284), that deeds (good and evil) will be weighed on scales (*mawāzīnu*; cf. Q. 101:6-11) and rewarded or punished accordingly (Q. 7:8 and 21:47), and that no *nafs* will be wronged (i.e. treated unjustly).

### 3.2.5. The Equity of Recompense

The aspect of judgement is further elaborated in the next two subdivisions (3.2.6 and 3.2.7). Regarding the equity of recompense, Wadud (1992:49; cf. 60<sup>18-24</sup>) quotes Q. 40:39-40 emphasizing a gender specifying statement in verse 40, of which the Arabic transliteration (partly supplied by Wadud) may be rendered as follows:

*man* ‘amila ṣāliḥan min dhakarīn aw unthā  
wa huwa *mu’min*  
fa *ulā’ika* yadkhulūna al-jannata

A literal translation is also provided by Wadud (1992:49):

Man [i.e., ‘who’] does good from male and female,  
and is a *mu’min*  
they (masculine plural form) will enter paradise.

She interprets the word *man*, which she says is used as an interrogative equivalent to the English “who” and “whoever”, as gender unspecific, stating (1992:49):

It is one of those Arabic terms used with both masculine and feminine with no change of form. However, in the usual androcentric analysis, *lafz* (term and form) is taken to be masculine and becomes feminine (or plural or dual) in meaning only after it becomes obvious that the word applies to something feminine (or plural or dual).

Furthermore, Wadud (ibid.) states:

That [the word] “*man* is used to express neutrality in the above verse [Q. 40:40] is clear from the wording ‘from male and female’ which follows it” (cf. *min dhakarīn aw unthā*.)”

“The use of *aw* meaning “or”, rather than *wa* meaning “and” indicates the individual, because it keeps the male and female distinct, separate: whichever one of the two.

She also comments (1992:49) on the use of the word *mu’min* which she regards as “neutral”, i.e., gender non-specific.

They [male and female] are both (and either) then described as *mu’min* (a believer). In this context [says Wadud] we can again take the masculine singular form as neutral, that is, not male *mu’min*, which by analogy or extension includes female *mu’minah*, but [i.e., because it functions as] neuter *mu’min*.

A similar kind of argumentation is used in connection with the pronoun, *ula’ika* (1992:49)

Finally, the plural *ula’ikā* proposes inclusiveness: not only each male and female, but also, every male and female who fits the description.

### **3.2.6. Recompense of the Individual**

Related to the “The Equity and Recompense” (3.2.5), “Recompense of the Individual” (3.2.6) is focused upon, quoting a range of Qur’anic verses in which individual responsibility comes to the fore. By way of introduction Wadud (1992:50) first refers to “the link between the end of an individual’s life and the responsibilities which each individual fulfils in life” (Q. 6:94). In her view:

Regarding the Hereafter, this individual responsibility and experience is given more emphasis [in the Qur’an].

She draws attention to Q. 3:185 and Q. 81:7 where the term *nafs* or *nufūs* is used, respectively. She then mentions (1992:50-51) five points featuring Qur’anic statements regarding recompense. Wadud firstly stresses, quoting verses that contain the term *nafs* (singular or plural), that recompense “is acquired not through gender, but through actions by the individual before death” (Q. 45:21-22); secondly, rewards or punishment is earned by the individual, and not Allah’s “doing” (Q. 10:44); thirdly “no one can share in the merits achieved by another”; fourthly, “no compensations [are] attained or retained on the basis of one’s relation to another”; and fifthly, that “there is an unusual consensus among commentators with regard to the absence of male/female distinctions in the Qur’anic accounts of judgement and recompense” (1992:51).

About the latter aspect of individual recompense in the hereafter, Wadud (1992:51) specifically refers to Q. 3:195 particularly the gender directed first part.

Firstly she translates (1992:51) the portion of the verse (*la uđī‘u ‘amala ‘āmilin min-kum min đakarīn aw untā ba ‘du-kum min ba ‘đin*) that concerns her

Lo! I suffer not the work any worker, male, or female, to be lost. You proceed one from another.

According to Wadud (ibid.):

Commentators often use verses like this to discuss the absence of gender [as regard recompense] in the hereafter.

Specific reference is made to al-Zamakhshari, Sayyid Qutb and Maududi. Wadud states:

Al-Zamakhshari says that the “worker” in this verse is clarified by the use of the “male and female” because they have a partnership in what Allah has promised (1992:51, 61<sup>32</sup>).

Sayyid Qutb says that “the work” is accepted from all; males and females, because “each of them is the same in humanness... and on the scales” (1992:51, 61<sup>33</sup>).

Maududi says the verse means; “in my sight (i.e., Allah), all of you are alike as human beings and I [Allah] have the same standard of justice and judgement for all, and men should not forget that women (are of/have) the same status as they themselves have (1992:51, 61<sup>34</sup>).

By way of footnote (1992:60<sup>15</sup>) Wadud remarks:

[The verse Q. 3:195] is commented by the commentators [mentioned above] ... as indicating essentially the same point: both males and females share in the reward of the Hereafter. Yet it does not carry as many of the significant yet subtle dimensions I will comment on using the verse.

She adds (1992:51):

Thus, it is inevitable that the details of my discussion will focus on points of contradiction to this equitable reward system (1992:51).

### **3.2.7. The Final Abode**

The last part of chapter three of *Qur’an and Woman* (1992) presents subdivisions that deal with aspects of the final destiny of man. They are the two ultimate destinies of man in the

Hereafter, negative (3.2.7.a) or positive (3.2.7.b), and some perspectives on companionship in the Hereafter (3.2.7.c and 3.2.8-9), followed by Wadud's idealized vision of the Hereafter (3.2.10) and a Summary (3.2.11).

Wadud commences the subsection, "The Final Abode", by making a few general remarks (1992:51), namely that:

The Qur'an acknowledges our earthly values and fears [cf. Q. 50:16... We know what his *nafs* whispers to him and We are nearer to him than his jugular vein].

Allah knows what is hidden and what is secret (Q. 3:5).

She then focuses on the Hereafter, stating that it "extends far beyond our imagination." Two Qur'anic verses are quoted in support. They are Q. 16:30 ("... the home of the Hereafter will be better") and Q. 2:201 ("... Give us ... in the Hereafter that which is good").

### 3.2.7.a. Hell

Brief reference (1992:52) is made to the Hell, associated with "various forms of chastisement, misery and despair, and cries of anguish." As regards gender, Wadud (1992:52) states:

[T]here is no gender distinction supplied or assumed in terminology or interpretation. Apparently, the tributes of despair or misery are not gendered (ibid.).

Wadud (1992:52) refers to verse Q. 43:74 (cf. *mujrimīna*, "guilty [persons]"; masculine plural) and Q. 77:28 (cf. *mukadhibīna*, "repudiators"; masculine plural), commenting by way of footnote (1992:61<sup>35</sup>):

Apparently, the use of the masculine plural for the depictions of Hell is never presumed to apply to males exclusively.

### 3.2.7.b. Paradise

In discussing Paradise, Wadud (1992:52) distinguishes between what she calls "eternal message" and "any form of articulation." Wadud (1992:52) basically draws an explicit

relationship between the context of the revelation and some of the specific descriptions rendered. She, however, argues (1992:52) that to confine the Qur'an to only that context would be incorrect. She opines (quoting Wan Daud 1989:7):

The "Qur'an is from God", and not confined to or exhausted by, one society and its history.

Furthermore

Thus, although the perspectives of the seventh-century desert people were given significant consideration in the Qur'an's modes of expression, its eternal message is not limited to any single form of articulation.

What she possibly means here is that there should be alternative interpretations of the Qur'an to allow for different understandings to prevail rather than being confined to the understanding of Islam of the first century. Wadud favours and advocates for multiple interpretive methods to arrive at an understanding which takes into consideration women's reading as well. According to Wadud (1992:53), "Each new generation of Qur'anic readers must re-evaluate Qur'anic values and, more specifically, must determine what the expressions of Paradise mean to them."

Wadud (1992:53) adds:

Without this double movement, we might limit the sensual descriptions of Paradise in the Qur'an to their narrowest literal meaning, rather than understand them as metaphorical indication of pleasure.

She opines (1992:61<sup>38</sup>):

Since Paradise and its pleasures are beyond human comprehension, the resemblance in these descriptions to pleasures experienced in this world must be taken analogously.

In this regard, Wadud (1992:53, 61<sup>39</sup> and Q. 3:14-15) argues:

First, the Qur'an acknowledges the good (*khair*) in some earthly things, like wealth, power, food, family status, offspring, and women.

Furthermore, she comments (1992:53 cf. Q. 100:6, 8):



However, the Qur'an presents the message that these good things must be viewed with eternity in mind.

To show how contextually determined Qur'anic information is, Wadud (1992:53) cites Q. 4:77:

The comfort of this world is scant; the Hereafter will be better for him who wards off evil; and you will not be wronged the down upon a date-stone [i.e., the thread inside a date seed]

Wadud concludes by saying, "Note how the terms are relative to the subconscious of a particular audience (one which knows of the date-palm), yet the notions are intended for the larger reading audience" (ibid.).

### **3.2.7.c. Companions in the Hereafter**

The next subdivision (3.2.7.c) provides Wadud's suggestions for interpreting traditional, Qur'an based views of Companions in the life to come. Regarding the subject of companions in the Hereafter, Wadud (1992:54) states:

It is clearly stated at various places in the Qur'an that one of the pleasures of Paradise will be some sort of companion. Discussions of these verses have gone to great lengths to specify the nature and number of these companions from the male perspective.

According to Wadud the Qur'an's "mechanism of communication" during the Makkan period was that it sought to convince the primary patriarchal society of the "authenticity of the message". It also sought "to demonstrate its relevance and significance"; to indicate the "short comings and weaknesses of the existing status quo", and "to persuade or entice them through offers and threats that appealed to their nature, understanding and experience."

Furthermore, Wadud (1992:54) refers to Q. 100:6-8 and 3:14-15 and says:

Individuals in power had a particular attitude with regards to the importance of wealth and women.

Wadud (1992:54) talks of descriptions of the companions in Paradise for the believers as being presented on three levels:

At the first level is the *hur-al-a'yn*, which reflects the level of thinking of the Makkan community described above.

The second level which is clearly depicted during the Madinan period (and in no way like the Makkan period) represents the practical model of the Islamic community life. Here the Qur'ān uses the term *zawj*.

Finally, at the third level, the Qur'an transcends both and expresses a perspective of companionship much greater than even these.

### **3.2.8. *Hur-al- 'Ayn* in Qur'anic Discussions of Paradise**

In the subdivision that follows, a specific category of women referred to in the Qur'an is discussed. Without mentioning any Qur'ānic verse such as Q. 44:54 [*bi-hūr 'aynin*], Wadud (1992:55) mentions the promise of marriage to (*bi*) *hūr 'aynin*. She visualizes the said companion as follows:

She was 'so-called by the Arabs of the desert because of her whiteness or fairness or cleanness.' She was a woman of 'clear complexion and skin.' The description given of the *huri* are specific and sensual, youthful, virgin females with dark eyes, white skin, and a pliant character (1992:55).

Portions within inverted commas are derived from Fatna A. Sabbah (1984:95)

Accordingly, says Wadud (1992:55), "[t]he Qur'an offers the *huri* as an incentive to aspire after the truth". She, furthermore, views the said depiction as "impossible to believe that the Qur'an intends white women with large eyes to represent a single universal description of beauty for all humankind". She argues:

If we take these mythological depictions universally as the ideal female, several culturally specific limitations are forced on the divergent audiences of the Qur'an. After the Makkan period, the Qur'an never uses this term again to depict the companions of Paradise.

### **3.2.9. *Zawj* in the Hereafter**

In addition to rectifying stereotypes of Qur'anic discussions of *Hur 'al- 'Ayn* in Qur'anic discussions of Paradise (3.2.8), Wadud, in the subsection below (3.2.9), addresses conceptions of inequity as regards *Zawj* in the Hereafter. She commences (1992:55) by criticizing "some commentators" who "disregard" the Qur'an's emphasis "that recompense is based on the individual." According to her:

The use of the term *zawj* has been interpreted [by these commentators] in such a manner that a "man has power to directly determine the fate of his spouse.

Wadud (1992:55) argues that “through these misinterpretations” of the word *zawj*, “the female *zawj* is either restricted by the limitations of her husband or given increased rewards based on his merits”. In the view of Wadud (1992:56), the above interpretation “contradicts the basic understanding in Islam, that we retain our individual responsibility for belief and disbelief when we marry, and that the value of good and evil is reflected ultimately on to the individual *nafs*” (1992:56). She argues that the meaning of the expression “you and your *zawj*” about the Hereafter needs a closer look:

First, the separation between good and evil takes precedence and the individual is recompensed only in accordance with his or her deeds [cf. Q. 37:21-2, 36:54-6 and 43:69-70].

Second, the Qur’an reminds us that only those who have done right will attain rewards in Paradise, even if on earth they are related [cf. Q. 40:8 and 13:23].

Finally, during the Madinan period the use of *zawj* and *azwaj* for the companions who await believers in Paradise reflects the essential pair as discussed in Chapter 2 [Q. 2:25, 3:15 and 4:54].

Wadud focuses on the aspect of reward (most of the verses) that is given, or punishment (Q. 37:21-2) meted out in accordance with earthly behavior. Views mentioned in connection with the third proposition (Q. 2:25, 3:15 and 4:54) each refers to “pure *azwaj*” (*azwajun mutahharatun*), e.g., Q. 2:25 (Wadud 1992:56):

And give glad tidings unto those that believe and do-good works, that theirs are Gardens underneath which are rivers... There for them are pure *azwaj*.

Wadud (1992:56), however, challenges the assumption based on the verse, namely that males would be given female partners in the Hereafter. She says:

The use of *zawj* and *azwaj* for the companions who await believers in Paradise reflects the essential pair. The emphasis then is on partnership, comfort, and harmony in Paradise, as opposed to the isolation, loneliness, and despair of Hell (ibid.).

Wadud does not regard the expression as gender specific. Elucidating the use of the noun *zawj* as expressed in the verse Q. 44:54 “*zawwajna-hum bi-hurin- ‘aynin*” (“We will pair them with the *hur-ul ‘ayn*”), she declares (1992:57):

The word *zawj* is not equal to the word *huri*. That the term *zawwaja* means “to join together or, to pair up” does not equate *zawj* with *huri*, but expresses, during the Makkan period that a man will be joined by a delightful companion according to his ideal.

Wadud (1992:57) nevertheless refers to the alternative traditional view. She remarks:

What is more, some commentators use the Qur'anic statements that there will be pure *azwaj* (i.e. plural) as indications that a pious man will go to Paradise and have multiple *huri* for his pleasure.

Her response is (1992:57):

Indeed, it is a contradiction of terms that a pious man practiced self-constraint should have multiple erotic pleasures as his objective.

Using a grammatical argument and referring to Qur'anic world-view, she explains that the absurdity of the above is twofold (1992:57):

First, the use of the plural *azwaj* [in Q. 44:54] corresponds to the use of the plural preceding it: for "believers" (and such terms [*al-muttaqīna*, "the righteous"]). The usage is meant to indicate that companionship awaits those who believe (male and female) in their attainment of Paradise, not that each man will get multiple wives.

Second, and more significant from my analysis, each use of *zawj* and *azwaj* is not equated with *huri*, because equating the terms reduces the Qur'anic depiction of the highest reality to a single ethnocentric worldview. Such a narrow perspective cannot be criticized enough.

In Wadud's argumentation, presupposition rules her interpretation, and she subsequently denies the validity of a literal reading of the respective Qur'anic verses.

### **3.2.10. The Hereafter from Allah's Perspective**

Before furnishing a Summary (3.2.11) of *Qur'an and Woman* (1992), chapter three, Wadud provides what is, in her view, the ideal of human beings' sojourn in Paradise, believing that which she surmises is in accord with the ultimate divine projection of the Hereafter. About subdivision "The Hereafter from Allah's Perspective", Wadud (1992:57-58) argues that:

Finally, Paradise offers a standard at an even higher level: the perspective of Allah. From this perspective, the greatest importance of Paradise is attaining peace, ending all want, transcending all earthly limitations, and finally, coming into the company of Allah. These highest pleasures are the same for female inhabitants of Paradise as for male.

Although she admits the sensual appeal of the depiction of Paradise, intended for the original audience, Wadud (1992:58) adds that sensual depictions should be interpreted within a holistic context, taking account higher values associated with the teaching of the Qur'an. However, the Qur'an's description of companions of Paradise must be viewed based on its

entire system of justice and its objective of universal guidance, and from its own descriptions of Allah's perspective.

### **3.2.11 Summary**

In her summary Wadud (1992:58) emphasizes the Qur'anic focus on the individual and his or her deeds. She reminds the reader that "recompense is distributed with complete equity." Furthermore, Wadud warns against a literal reading of "the detailed and graphic descriptions of the Hereafter". Priority must be given to Madinan depictions particularly as regards *zawj* (1992:59). Wadud once again stresses "closeness" to Allah as the "greatest value of Paradise". She concludes, "The reward for good is good".

##

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