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## Khadijah bint Khuwaylid

The earliest significant individual is Muhammad's first wife, Khadijah bint [daughter of] Khuwaylid (d. 619 CE). Very little is known of her early life. The sources make it clear, however, that when Muhammad first met her she was a widow and an effective businesswoman, playing a role in her own right in the caravan trade. Muhammad acted as a reliable and trustworthy agent for her in her business dealings, and eventually they married (595 CE is the traditionally accepted date). The marriage was happy and fruitful. She bore Muhammad four daughters, and possibly two sons, both of whom died in infancy.

Khadijah believed that Muhammad had truly been called as the Messenger of God. She said that no one of his qualities and virtues could be deceived by a devil. She was the first Muslim. She stood by him during the years when the tribes of Mecca boycotted and persecuted him until she died in 619 after 24 years of marriage. She endured successive pregnancies, and one of her daughters, Fatima, was to play a key role in subsequent Muslim life and devotion.

## 'A'isha bint Abu Bakr

'A'isha (613–678 CE) was the daughter of Abu Bakr, one of Muhammad's earliest followers and closest personal friends—and the man who was to be the first leader of the Muslim community after Muhammad's death in 632 CE. The betrothal in 620, when 'A'isha was seven, and the marriage in 622 were marks of the depth of friendship between the two men.

'A'isha was the closest of Muhammad's wives to him. She is also the one about whom most is known. She displayed a strong, individual personality. There are 2210 sayings of the Prophet (**hadith**) related through her. By way of comparison, only one other of Muhammad's wives, Umm Salma, is recorded as transmitting hadith, and she only related 378.

An event in 'A'isha's life is mentioned in the Qur'an (sura 24:11–19). It is related that on the way back from an expedition on which she accompanied the Prophet (she was carried in a howdah mounted on the back of a camel), the party halted for a while. She dismounted from the howdah to relieve herself and dropped a necklace. On returning to the howdah, she realised she had dropped it and returned to look for it. While she was searching, the caravan moved on, the bearers thinking she was inside the howdah. Left alone, she waited for someone to come back for her when she was missed. While she was waiting, an individual from the rearguard following the caravan discovered her and recognised her. Modestly setting her on his own camel, he brought her back to Madina, where she had not yet been missed. The circumstances appeared compromising, and there were rumours that she had been guilty of adultery. Muhammad was perplexed. The matter escalated into a dispute that could have divided the Muslim community. Muhammad asked advice from his companions. His cousin 'Ali suggested that he put an end to the matter by divorcing her. For this, it is said, 'A'isha never forgave 'Ali. Others including a female servant insisted that 'A'isha's

virtue was absolute. Eventually Muhammad received a revelation declaring her innocence. When her parents urged her to be grateful to them and to Muhammad, she replied: 'No thanks to you. You did not believe me. Thanks is due to God alone.'

There are other possible references to 'A'isha in the Qur'an, in particular to Muhammad's relations with Mary the Copt—who bore a son, Ibrahim, to Muhammad—and her jealousy of the newcomer. (Ibrahim died aged 18 months.)

When 'Ali became Caliph in 656 CE, 'A'isha moved into the spotlight again. When there was a revolt against him, she took the side of the rebels and rode to the battlefield in a howdah mounted on a camel. The fighting was fierce—it is said that the howdah was like a hedgehog, so many were the arrows sticking out of it. After 'Ali's army won, 'Ali approached her, and she said to him, 'You have been victorious, now be magnanimous.' He treated her with every courtesy and sent her under escort to Madina, where she lived the rest of her life in obscurity, but accessible to Muslims concerned with stories about the Prophet and the meaning of hadith.

'A'isha's personality and popular memories of her are important in Muslim life. Her name is a popular choice for girls, and she is a leading figure for women's movements and organisations in the Muslim world. For example, the leading reformist organisation in Indonesia (30 000 000 members) is known as *Muhammadiyah*. The women's division is known as '*A'ishiya*.

### activity

Khadijah and 'A'isha were two very important women in Muhammad's life. Who were they and what impact did they have on Muhammad and the early development of Islam?

### Fatima al-Zahra (Fatima the Radiant)

Fatima (c.605–633 CE) was probably Muhammad's youngest child, and she was the only one to survive him. She married his paternal cousin 'Ali and was the only one of his children to bear him grandchildren, two entered the pages of history, Hasan and Husayn. It is these two and their descendants of the Shi'a wing

Fatima does not have the role in history thanks to her personality that 'A'isha did. Neither she nor any of Muhammad's other daughters are recorded as transmitting any hadith. But part of the theology of the Shi'a is the suffering of the Imams, and Fatima too, in the six months or so she lived after the death of her father, shared in that suffering. The Shi'a believe she suffered because her husband 'Ali was cheated of his right to leadership of the Muslim community after the death of Muhammad. She suffered because Abu Bakr deprived her of what she had the right to inherit from her father. She suffered because she was allowed to foresee the martyrdom of her two sons, Hasan and Husayn. Hasan died in 669 CE, perhaps by poisoning, and Husayn died a martyr's death, with his body treated ignominiously, at the battle of Karbala' (in present-day Iraq) in 680 CE.

Fatima had perhaps five children: Hasan and Husayn, two daughters, Zaynab and Umm Kulthum, and a third son who died in infancy.

Spiritually, among the Shi'a, Fatima enjoys a wonderfully privileged position. There is a hadith (not rejected by the Sunnis) that describes her as 'Queen of the women in Paradise', next to Maryam, daughter of 'Imran. She is given the title *batul*, virgin, not because she did not conceive by intercourse with 'Ali but because she was never defiled by menstruation. She is known as *al-Zahra* ('the Radiant'). For the Shi'a she is the embodiment of all that is divine in womanhood—'the noblest ideal of human conception' (Sayeed Ameer Ali).

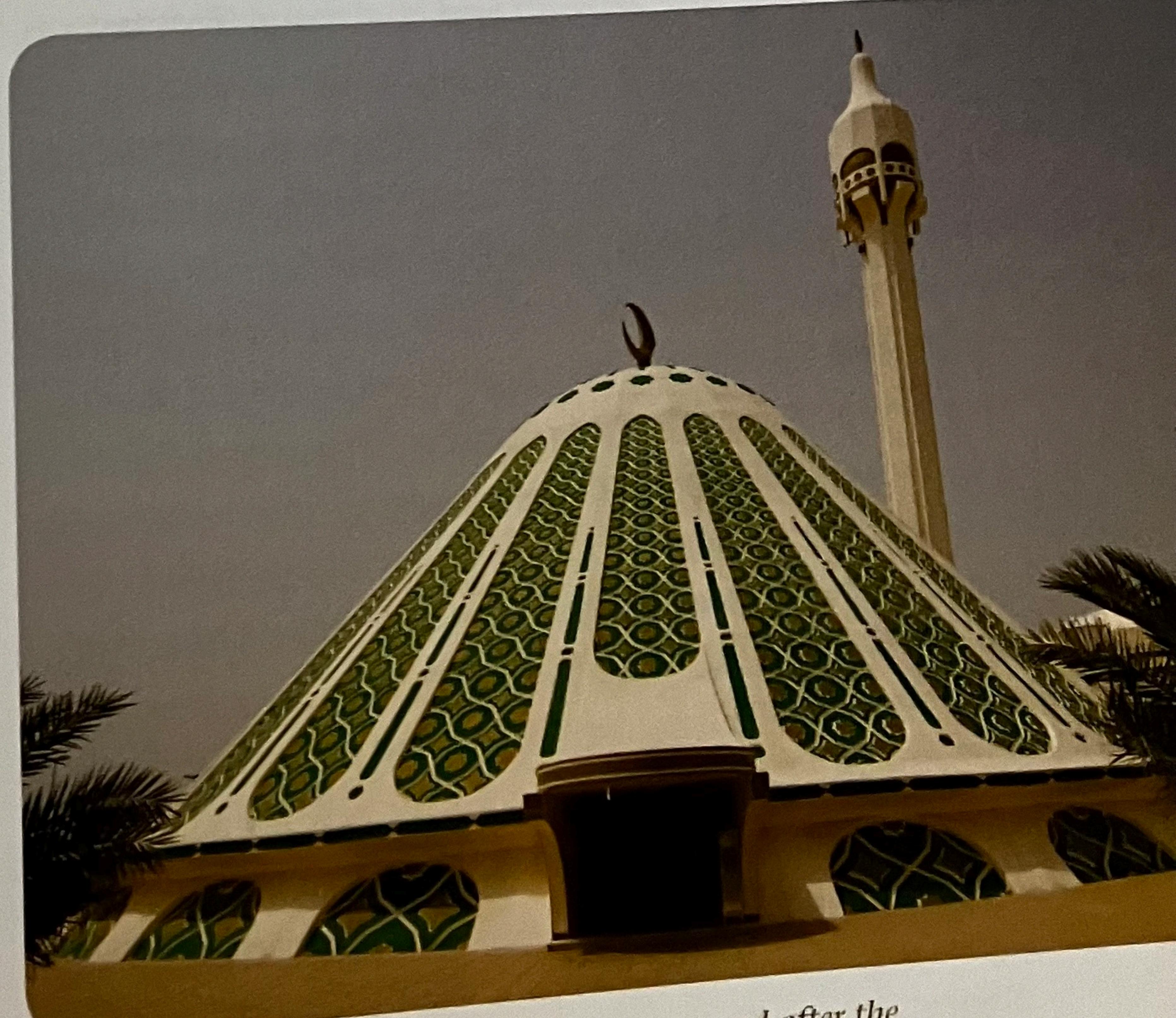


FIG. 13.2 Al Fatima mosque in Kuwait is named after the daughter of Muhammad.

# Islamic ethics

In Islam, human obligations are divided into two broad categories: those that have to do with duties to God ('Ibadat) and those that concern human relationships (Mu'amala').

The Qur'an sets out in broad outline the law that is to govern human life. It represents the pre-ordained structure of God's commands. It is the *shari'a*, the highway along which life is to be lived. It makes no distinction between family, criminal, or ritual law. All are part of a single texture. The understanding and ascertaining of that law is the discipline of fiqh (jurisprudence).

The ethical principles of Islam are based on obedience to God's law. Basically this entails the formation of conscience in a way that stresses human recognition of the sovereignty of God, human responsibility to obey God's law, respect for others, and the recognition that property, even of the most wealthy, is held in trust.

The zeal to live according to these principles and to realise them fully is the essence of *jihad*, which includes within its range of meanings the idea of struggle against 'evil tendencies'. This includes a continuing struggle against the personal faults and flaws to which everyone is subject: greed, selfishness and resentment. The word is well known for its application to the concept of 'holy war', but it is important to note that this is only one of its senses. The term *jihad* is applied to every aspect of putting into practice Islamic ethical principles.

Muslims apply the basic principles of fiqh (see Chapter 5, pages 120–21) to broader issues, forming the basis for the development of legal opinions on a range of characteristically modern problems, among them bioethical issues, environmental ethics and sexual ethics.

## activities

In Islam, human obligations are duties to God ('Ibadat) and those that concern human relationships (Mu'amala'). Describe each and how they are explained by the Qur'an.

## Bioethical issues

Bioethical issues include contraception. There is a range of Muslim views on this. The principles used for discussing its lawfulness or otherwise are drawn from the Qur'an, sayings attributed to the Prophet, and the opinions of the founders of the four major Islamic law schools.

Withdrawal before ejaculation as a form of contraception was known to the early Muslims. There seem to have been three principal views regarding contraception:

1. that it might be practised subject to no conditions
2. that its permissibility was subject to the wife's consent
3. that it was in every case unlawful.

The great 12th-century scholar al-Ghazali held that contraception was permissible provided that it was performed in order to preserve a woman's health or save her life, to avoid financial hardship or to avoid domestic problems caused by a large family. He added the qualification, however, that it was not permissible if the intention was to avoid the birth of female children.

These considerations, and the fact that there is no record of Muhammad having condemned withdrawal, are widely taken—in Pakistan and Indonesia, for instance—as sufficient grounds to regard family planning programs as permissible. There are, however, some who take the view that contraception for fear of poverty represents a lack of trust in God's promise that every child born will be provided for by divine providence.

Likewise, there are different Islamic views on abortion. Some ban it completely. Others regard it as lawful up to the time of 'ensoulment', usually calculated as occurring after 120 days of pregnancy. There are some who put a limit of 40 days on the permissibility of abortion; others prescribe 80 days. It may be noted that in Indonesia, which has a vigorous family planning program, abortion at any stage of pregnancy is illegal.

Infanticide, which was practised among the Arabs at the time of the Prophet, and is explicitly referred to in the Qur'an, is condemned without qualification.

There is no objection to the assisted insemination of a wife with the sperm of her husband, but the use of sperm from a man other than the husband (that is, from a donor) is regarded as tantamount to adultery. As for surrogate motherhood, it is condemned for a number of reasons: it is against the law of God because it tampers with the normal process of procreation; it biologically divides motherhood and confuses the institution of paternity; and by reducing motherhood from a value to a price, it becomes an evil form of exploitation.

There is little if any disagreement on euthanasia. In Islamic theology, life and death are exclusively in God's hands, and represent an area in which human beings have no right to intervene.

### activities

Use biomedical examples to explain how Muslim ethics may be interpreted using the Qur'an, sayings attributed to the Prophet and the opinions of the founders of the four major law schools.

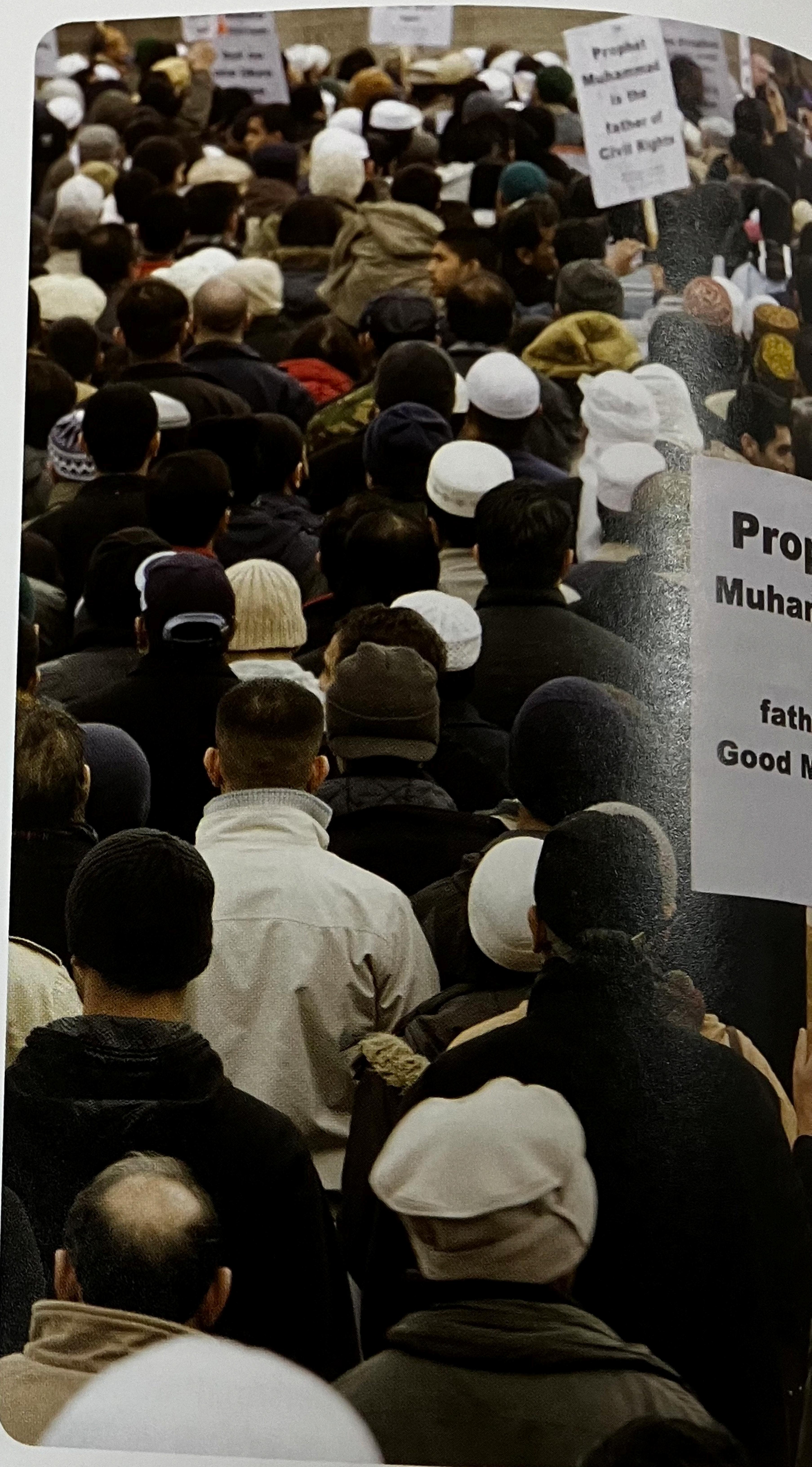
## Environmental ethics

Muslim thinkers have found in Islamic principles the basis for an environmental ethic. Discussion of the environment as an issue in its own right is a relatively recent development in the theology of the Judaeo-Christian-Muslim tradition.

Contemporary Muslim writers understand the word 'Scale' in sura 55:7–8 of the Qur'an as referring to a necessary balance between human needs on earth and the welfare of other creatures in their own environments. The passage reads as follows:

*He has raised up the heavens and set the Scale of Justice [so firmly] that you cannot play it false.*

All living things are part of a whole, linked together on a planet on which, as far as is known, the balance of factors that sustains life is unique. The human life-cycle depends on care for the environment—for the rivers, forest



**FIG. 13.9** Large crowds massed through London streets protesting the Danish cartoon series caused offence to the Muslim community in February 2006

'heirs to the earth', is understood as entrusting humankind with this responsibility.

Care for the environment is linked in Islam with a care for animals: no living thing should be slain without due cause, and ill-treatment of animals is forbidden.

### activities

1. Explain how the Qur'an is used to support environmental protection.

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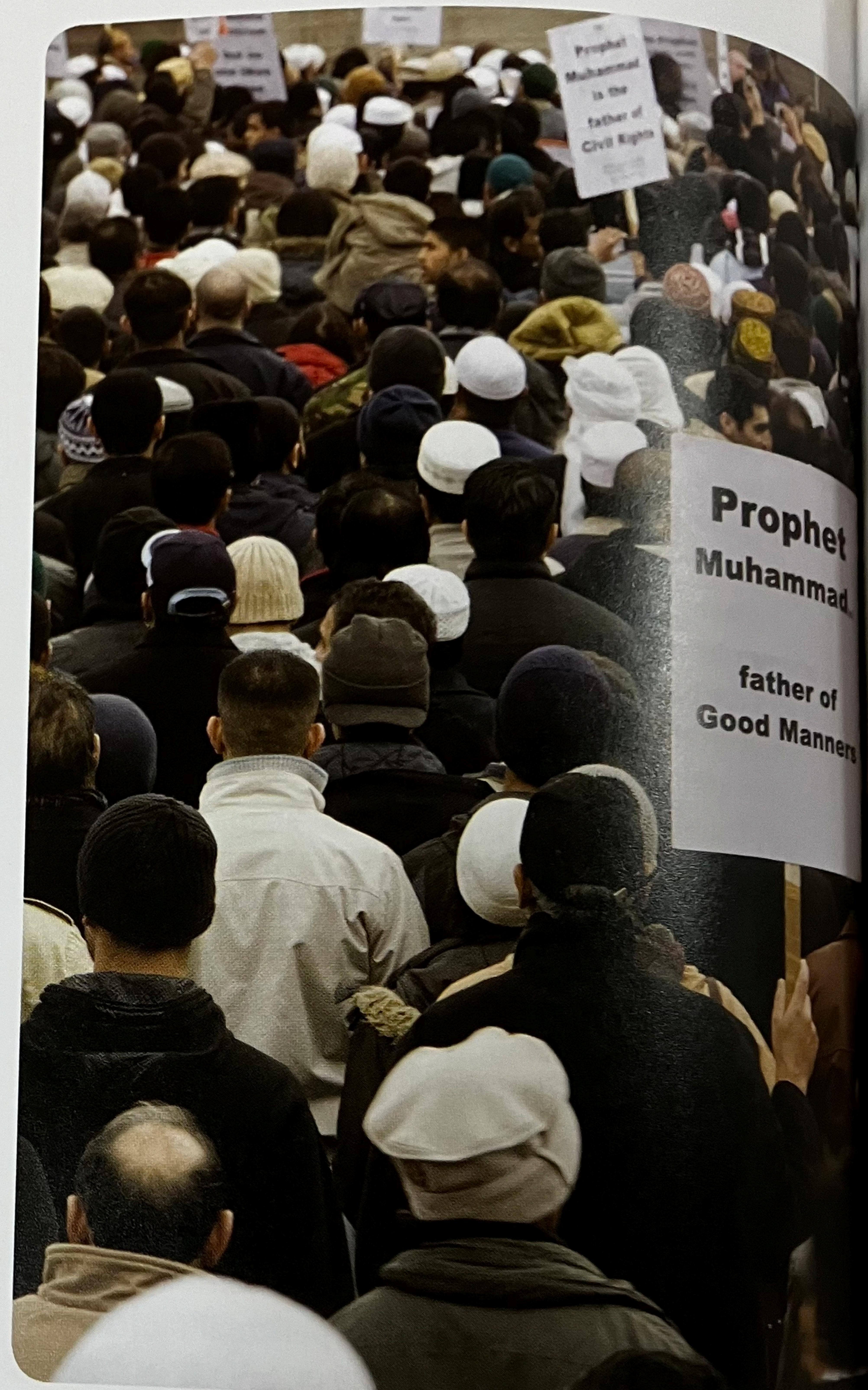


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### activities

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2. Debate ...