

# Islamic Bioethics

Victoria Erhart

Los Alamos Faith and Science Forum

Summer 2023



# Life of Prophet Muhammad

570 CE Born in Mecca

610 CE Begins to receive revelations

622 CE Forced to flee from Mecca to Medina; eventually returns to Mecca

632 CE Prophet Muhammad dies

661 CE Sunni-Shiite Muslim split

Late 7<sup>th</sup> c. CE Revelations compiled into Qur'an



# Map of Arabian Peninsula

Note caravan cities of Mecca and Medina on west coast.



# 5 Pillars of Islam

Profession of Faith: There is no God but God and Muhammad is God's Prophet

Prayer – 5 times daily

Fasting – especially during month of Ramadan when Qur'an first began to be revealed

Almsgiving/Charity – 2% of income

Hajj – pilgrimage to Mecca/Medina once in a Muslim's life if possible



# Mecca and Medina

**Grand Mosque in Mecca with Kaaba**



**Mosque of the Prophet in Medina**



# Opening of the Qur'an

In the name of God, the infinitely  
Compassionate and Merciful.  
Praise be to God, Lord of all the worlds.  
The Compassionate, the Merciful. Ruler  
on the Day of Reckoning.  
You alone do we worship, and You alone  
do we ask for help.  
Guide us on the straight path,  
the path of those who have received  
your grace;  
not the path of those who have brought  
down wrath, nor of those who wander  
astray.  
Amen.



# Medieval Islamic Medicine



From an Ottoman manuscript: Two doctors telling the pharmacist how to make different medicines

# Bioethics Institutes in Islamic World

1977 The Islamic Fiqh (Legal) Academy = IFA in Mecca, Saudi Arabia

1981 The International Islamic Fiqh (Legal) Academy = IIFA in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia

1984 The Islamic Organization for Medical Sciences = IOMS in Kuwait

1967 The Islamic Medical Association of North America = IMANA in Illinois



# Definition of Ijtihad

Ijtihad = collective reasoning; interdisciplinary communication toward a common goal

Ijtihad = religious scholars and scientists as co-muftis or authorities

# Definition of Fatwa

Fatwa = a formal ruling or interpretation on a point of Islamic law given by a qualified legal scholar known as a mufti.

Though considered authoritative, fatwas are not treated as binding judgments. A requester who finds a fatwa unconvincing is permitted to seek another opinion.

Models that can be used to balance the competing claims of science and religion:

Reject religious belief

Re-interpret religious data or religious text

Reject sense perceptible evidence

Re-interpret sense data

Reject claims of science

# Prominence Given to Religious Information

“It is important to note that the Qur’an and the Hadith are considered permanent and valid whereas scientific and medical information is contingent and subject to change.”

Mohammad Ghaly, “The Beginning of Human Life: Islamic Bioethical Perspectives,” Zygon 47:1 (March 2012), p. 187

# Creation of Human Life from the Qur'an

## **Sura 22:5**

“We have created you from dust, then from a drop of seed, then from a clot, then from a little lump of flesh, shapely and shapeless. And We cause that you will remain in the womb for an appointed time, and afterward We bring you forth as infants, then give you growth that you will attain your full strength.”

## **Sura 15:28-29**

“And remember when the Lord said unto the angels: Lo! I am creating a mortal out of potter's clay of black mud. So, when I have made him and have breathed into him My spirit, do ye fall down, prostrating yourselves unto him.”

# When Does Human Life Begin?

Fetal Growth From 8 to 40 Weeks



# When Does Human Life Begin?

Fatwa: Life Begins at Conception from Sura 76:2

“For” indeed, We “alone” created humans from a drop of mixed fluids, “in order” to test them, so We made them hear and see.

Fatwa: Life Begins When Fertilized Egg Implants in Uterine Wall from Sura 53:32

Indeed, your Lord is vast in forgiveness. He was most knowing of you when He produced you from the earth and when you were fetuses in the wombs of your mothers.

# When Does Human Life Begin?

Fatwa: Embryogenesis is an extremely gradual process and there is no way to pinpoint exactly a specific moment to claim “here is the beginning of human life.”

Fatwa: Human life begins at 40 days from Sura 32:7-9

Who has perfected everything He created. And He originated the creation of humankind from clay. Then He made his descendants from an extract of a humble fluid, then He fashioned them and had a spirit of His Own ‘creation’ breathed into them. And He gave you hearing, sight, and intellect.



# When Does Human Life Begin?

Fatwa: Brain and nervous system development from modern neurobiology

12<sup>th</sup> week of pregnancy marks the beginning of full brain shape

Fatwa: 120 days after fertilization from Hadith in the tradition of Ibn Ma'sud

“The creation of one of you is put together in his mother’s womb in 40 days, then he becomes a clot of congealed blood for a similar period, then a little lump for a similar period.”

# Distinction Between a Human and a Fetus

“When men strive together, and hurt a woman with child, so that there is a miscarriage, and yet no harm follows, the one who hurt the woman shall be fined according as the woman’s husband shall lay upon him; and he shall pay as the judges determine.”

Exodus 21:22

## Ensoulement in the Hadith

Then Allah sends an angel who is ordered to write four things. He is ordered to write down his (each person's) deeds, his livelihood, his (date of) death, and whether he will be blessed or wretched (in religion). Then the soul is breathed into him... (Hadith in the tradition of al-Bukhari no: 3036).



# Medicine and Metaphysics in Sura 23:12-14

We created man out of the extract of clay, then We made him into a drop of life-germ, then We placed it in a safe depository; then We made this drop into a clot, then We made the clot into a lump, then We made the lump into bones, then We clothed the bones with flesh, and then We caused it to grow into another creation. Thus Most Blessed is Allah, the Best of all those that create.

Now let the disbelievers consider the message of the Prophet (peace be upon him) by observing their own creation, for this will convince them of its truth by proving its doctrine of Tauhid. The origin of man is from a mere inanimate sperm-drop, which undergoes several changes in the womb of the mother. But after this, when it sees the light of the day, it is quite a different creation from the embryo in the womb. Now it can hear, it can see, and in due course of time it can talk and think. Then, when he reaches adulthood and maturity, he is capable of performing wonderful deeds. It is obvious that Allah alone could create all these characteristics in an inanimate sperm-drop.

# Abortion in Islam

**"Do not destroy a life that Allah has declared sacred except for just cause."**

(Holy Quran, 25:69)

**"Kill not your children for fear of poverty. It is We Who provide for them and for you. Surely, the killing of them is a great sin."**

Holy Quran, 17:32)



# Ethical Utilitarianism in Shariah Law

The five major goals of the Shariah are the protection of sound religious practice, life, sanity, the family, and personal and communal wealth. The acknowledgement of sound local customs throughout the world is one of the five basic maxims of the Sharia according to all Islamic schools of law.

# Embryonic Research in Islam

Stem cell research for therapeutic purposes is permissible with full consideration, and all possible precautions in the pre-ensoulment stages of early fetus development, if the source is legitimate.

# Infertility in the Qur'an

## **Sura 42:49-50**

“Unto God belongs the sovereignty of the heavens and the earth. God creates what God wills. God bestows female offspring on whom God wills, and male offspring on whom God wills, God mingles male and female offspring and makes barren whom God wills.”

## **Sura 21:89-91**

### **[Luke 1:5-17]**

“Zachariah cried unto God: My God. Leave me not childless thought You are the best of all inheritors. The We heard his prayer and bestowed upon him John and transformed his wife to bear a child for him. And she was chaste, therefore We breathed into her of Our spirit and made her and her son a sign for all peoples.”



# Assisted Reproductive Technologies in the Qur'an

## Sura 2:223

Your wives are a place of sowing seed for you, so come to your place of cultivation however you wish and put forth righteousness for yourselves. And fear God. Know that you will meet God.

# Brain Death as Actual Death in the Qur'an

Sura 17:85

“They will ask you concerning the spirit/soul. Say: The spirit/soul is by command of my God,  
and of knowledge we have been given but little.”

# Organ Donation and Transplant Issues in the Qur'an

Sura 5:32

“For whosoever kills a human being it shall be as if he had killed all mankind. And who so saves the life of one human being, it shall be as if he had saved the life of mankind.”

# End of Life Issues in the Qur'an

None of you should make a wish to die because of damage that was struck. If it is unavoidable, then you should pray to God. 'O God, whenever life is better for me then let me live, and whenever death is better for me then let me die. (Hadith)

