

VIEW POINT

## A Woman's Reflection on Leading Prayer

*By Yasmin Mogahed*

"Given my privilege as a woman, I only degrade myself by trying to be something I'm not--and in all honesty--don't want to be: a man. As women, we will never reach true liberation until we stop trying to mimic men, and value the beauty in our own God-given distinctiveness."

On March 18, 2005 Amina Wadud led the first female-led Jum'ah (Friday) prayer. On that day women took a huge step towards being more like men. But, did we come closer to actualizing our God-given liberation?

I don't think so.

What we so often forget is that God has honored the woman by giving her value in relation to God—not in relation to men. But as western feminism erases God from the scene, there is no standard left—but men. As a result the western feminist is forced to find her value in relation to a man. And in so doing she has accepted a faulty assumption. She has accepted that man is the standard, and thus a woman can never be a full human being until she becomes just like a man—the standard.

When a man cut his hair short, she wanted to cut her hair short. When a man joined the army, she wanted to join the army. She wanted these things for no other reason than because the "standard" had it.

What she didn't recognize was that God dignifies both men and women in their distinctiveness—not their sameness. And on March 18, Muslim women made the very same mistake.

For 1400 years there has been a consensus of the scholars that men are to lead prayer. As a Muslim woman, why does this matter? The one who leads prayer is not spiritually superior in any way. Something is not better just because a man does it. And leading prayer is not better, just because it's leading. Had it been the role of women or had it been more divine, why wouldn't the Prophet have asked Ayesha or Khadija, or Fatima—the greatest women of all time—to lead? These women were promised heaven—and yet they never lead prayer.

But now for the first time in 1400 years, we look at a man leading prayer and we think, "That's not fair." We think so although God has given no special privilege to the one who leads. The imam is no higher in the eyes of God than the one who prays behind.