



# WOMEN'S RIGHTS IN ISLAM





In the Name of Allah,  
the Most Gracious,  
the Most Merciful



## WOMEN AS WIVES

Allah, the Exalted, says in the Glorious Qur'an:

“Among His signs is that He created for you wives from among yourselves, that you may find tranquility in them, and He has put between you affection and mercy.” [30:21]

One of the great signs of the Benevolence, Mercy and Power of Allah, the Exalted, is that He created for mankind mates, one from the other, so that they are comforted, satisfied and assisted by one another.

The basic foundation of the society is the family, and the husband and the wife are co-partners in that family upon which a Muslim home is established. For the success of the family and the tranquility of the home, Islam grants each spouse certain rights and duties. We will only focus on the rights of the wives in the following section.



## 01 DOWRY:

A dowry is the right of every bride at the time of marriage. A marriage contract is not considered legal and complete unless a dowry has been specified. This right cannot be forfeited, even if the bride approves, until after the marriage contract is completed. The dowry belongs to the woman entering marriage, and she has the freedom to do whatever she wants with what she owns after the marriage contract is fulfilled. Allah, the Exalted, states in the Qur'an:

“Give the women whom you marry their dowry with a good heart. If they remit any part of it to you, of their own good pleasure, take it and enjoy it fully without fear of any harm.” [4:4]

The husband is not allowed to take anything back from the dowry if he decides later to divorce her; as Allah, the Exalted, states in the Qur’an:

“If you want to replace one wife with another and you have given one of them a great amount [in gifts], do not take [back] from it anything. Would you take it in injustice and manifest sin? And how could you take it while you have gone in unto each other and they have taken from you a solemn covenant?” [4:20-21]

This verse indicates the sacredness of the marriage vows and the intimacy of the marriage relationship, as well as the right of retaining the dowry gift in case of divorce. Allah, the Exalted, also states in the Qur’an:

“O you who believe! You are forbidden to inherit women against their will, and do not make difficulties for them in order to take [back] part of what you gave them unless they commit a clear immorality. And live with them in kindness. For if you dislike them - perhaps you dislike a thing and Allah makes therein much good.” [4:19]

This verse ensures the wife's rights and complete justice even if the man dislikes her for any reason. This is also mentioned in an authentic prophetic tradition wherein Abu Hurairah reported that the Messenger of Allah ﷺ said:

“A believer must not hate a believing woman (his wife). If he dislikes one of her characteristics, he will be pleased with another.” [Muslim]



## 02 FINANCIAL SUPPORT:

The husband must give honorable and sufficient sustenance to his household according to his status and means. Allah, the Exalted, says:

“Let the rich man spend according to his means, and the man whose resources are restricted, let him spend according to what Allah has given him. Allah puts no burden on any person beyond what He has given him. Allah will grant after hardship ease.” [65:7]

If a sufficiently rich man refuses to spend on his family in accordance with his level of means, and the wife was able to take a portion of his wealth, she may take that which satisfies her essential needs and that of her children, avoiding wastage and extravagance. Hind bint 'Utbah came to the Prophet ﷺ complaining about her husband, saying: "My husband is a miser and does not spend enough on me and his children." He replied: "Take whatever suffices you and your child within proper bounds." [Bukhari]

If a husband came under heavy financial strain and was incapable of fulfilling his family's financial needs, or if he left his wife for an extensive period of time, whereby the wife was harmed due to that absence, the wife is entitled to seek court intervention, if she desires to annul that marriage, as indicated by the verdicts of the jurists in Islamic jurisprudence.

The Prophet of Allah ﷺ explained these rights when he said:

“Fear Allah in regards to women for you have taken them by the oath of Allah, and made intimate relations with them legal by the sacred word of Allah. Your right is that no one you dislike should be allowed to enter your home ... and their right is that you feed and clothe them within your limits.” [Muslim]

The Prophet ﷺ said to his companion Sa’ad ibn Abi Waqqas:

“No amount you spend on your family seeking reward from Allah but that He will reward you, even if it is a bite of food that you place in your wife’s mouth.” [Bukhari & Muslim]



## 03 JUSTICE, EQUALITY AND FAIRNESS:

Men who are married to more than one wife are required to act with justice, fairness and equality in dealing with them. This includes provision, clothing, housing and sharing his time, concerns and intimate relations. Allah, the Beneficent, says:

“And if you fear that you will not deal justly with the orphan girls, then marry those that please you of [other] women, two or three or four. But if you fear that

you will not be just, then marry only one or those your right hand possesses. That is more suitable that you may not incline to injustice.” [4:3]

The Prophet of Allah ﷺ said:

“Whoever has two wives and favors one of them over the other, will come on the Day of Resurrection with one of his sides leaning.” [Abu Dawood, Tirmidhi, & others and verified]

This indicates that the husband must demonstrate justice, fairness and equality amongst all his wives. He is warned of this dire punishment of paralysis and deformity in the hereafter, just as he paralyzed and deformed the rights of one of his wives in this world.

It is unlawful for a man to mistreat his wife in any fashion with abuse, hardships, harassment, undue burdens, insults, beatings, abuse to her wealth and funds, forbidding her from lawful

outings, and so forth in an attempt to force her to pay all that she possesses as ransom to her husband so that he may release her through divorce. Islamic laws do permit the husband to impose certain restrictions upon the wife that displays some immoral and shameful conduct that is reasonably deemed to be harmful to the entire society and social order. The purpose of these restrictions is to encourage her to return to proper behavior. Those who continue to act indiscreetly, leading to suspicion of actual infidelity may be offered divorce, just as she may seek “Khul’a” wherein she asks for dissolving the marriage contract due to his misbehavior.



## 04 PROTECTION AND PRESERVATION:

A husband must protect and prevent his wife and children from any possible harm or immorality to the best of his abilities. Allah, the Exalted, says:

“O you who have believed, protect yourselves and your families from a Fire whose fuel is people and stones, over which are [appointed] angels, harsh and severe; they do not disobey Allah in what He commands them but do what they are commanded.” [66:6]

All that protects from unlawful and shameful deeds is commendable, but extremism is not. He ﷺ also said:

“There is a kind of jealousy that Allah loves and a kind which He hates. The kind that he loves is in the doubtful acts, and the kind he hates is in the acts without any doubt.” [Abu Dawood & Nasa’i]

The Prophet of Allah ﷺ also said:

“Verily Allah gets jealous and the believer gets jealous and the jealousy of Allah is to see a believer doing unlawful acts ...” [Bukhari, & Muslim]



## 05 COMPANIONSHIP, CARE AND INTIMATE RELATIONSHIPS:

A husband must live with his wife honorably, kindly and with respect. He must maintain a decent, clean and acceptable appearance when he relaxes in his household, just as he likes his wife to do for him at home, since this is only mutual respect and decency to one another. The Prophet of Allah ﷺ said, encouraging and explaining the comprehensive principle about good character and behavior:

“The most complete believers are those with the best characters, and the best of you are those who are best to their womenfolk.” [Tirmidhi & Ibn Hibbaan, and verified]

The Messenger of Allah ﷺ used to mend his own clothes and shoes and help his wives with their daily chores. His wife Aishah was once asked: “What did the Messenger of Allah use to do while at home?” She responded: “He used to serve and assist his household, and when he would hear the call to prayer, he would leave to pray.” [Bukhari]

The Messenger of Allah ﷺ was always pleasant, kind and caring to all, and would occasionally play and joke politely with his family members. The Prophet of Allah ﷺ said:

“Everything devoid of the remembrance of Allah is just vanity except four: to joke and play with one’s wife, to train one’s

horse, to travel between two destinations, and to learn swimming.”

[Nasa'ee and verified]

This tradition indicates that most pastimes and amusements are a waste of time and are therefore without reward, except these mentioned above which are useful, lawful, and fulfill valid beneficial purposes. Allah's Prophet ﷺ is also well known for being cheerful and decent in joking with his family and playing with them. An example of this fun pastime is when 'Aishah the mother of the believers, said:

Allah's Prophet ﷺ raced with me and I won the race before I grew and gained weight. After I became a bit older and put on weight he raced with me again and he won. The Prophet of Allah ﷺ said to me upon winning the race:

“This (win of mine makes up) for that (win of yours).” [Ahmad & Abu Dawood]



The Messenger of Allah ﷺ is reported to have sat in the house for a short while with his family, talking to them, giving them company and showing kindness, before going to sleep, and after offering the late evening prayer. In the authentic traditions we find that Ibn ‘Abbas narrated:

“I slept at the house of Maymunah (his aunt and the Prophet’s wife) one night to see the Prophet’s worship in night prayer. He talked with his wife for a period of time, and then slept. Later in

the night he awakened and prayed what Allah had written for him.” [Bukhari & Muslim]

Allah, the Exalted, states in the Glorious Qur’an:

“Indeed, in the Messenger of Allah, you have a good example to follow for whoever has hope in the Meeting with Allah and the Last Day, and remembers Allah much.” [33:21]

Hence, Allah’s Prophet ﷺ is the best example to follow for all. Muslims ought to follow the pattern of Allah’s Prophet ﷺ in all of their affairs, personal and public, throughout their lives.

All the secrets of the wife should be kept and preserved and her shortcomings hidden. No private affairs should be made public or shared as a conversation item, even among the closest friends. The Messenger of Allah ﷺ said:

“One of the worst people in the sight of

Allah on the Day of Resurrection is a man who has intimate relations with his wife, or a wife who has the same with her husband, then one of them discloses that privacy to others.” [Muslim & others]

It is the right of the married woman to spend the night with her husband and have sexual fulfillment, satisfaction, and gratification. This right is one of the most emphasized rights in Islam, equal to the need of man to have his fulfillment. The husband is required and obliged by Islamic law to fulfill the sexual rights of his spouse, to ensure the satisfaction of the spouse so as to prevent her from being inclined towards shameful acts, may Allah forbid. A spouse, as any other female, has a great need for being loved and cherished, cared for, and fulfillment of her natural and physical rightful desires.

Islam forbids husbands from engaging themselves in matters of physical worship and devotions, like prayers and fasting, in a way that may detract them from attending to their spouses' physical, sexual and social needs. In a famous incident Salman Al-Farisi reported:

“I went to visit my brother in faith, Abu-Darda and upon arrival, I was greeted by his spouse Um Darda who was in an unkempt state. Seeing that, I asked her, ‘What is the matter with you; why are you in this state and not attentive to your husband?’ She said: ‘Your brother, Abu-Darda has no interest in this world and its affairs. He spends his nights praying and his days fasting!’ Upon the arrival of Abu-Darda, who welcomed Salman and offered him some food, Salman said: ‘Why do not you eat with me?’ Abu-Darda said: ‘I am fasting.’

Salman said: 'By Allah, you must break your fast and eat with me.' Abu-Darda broke his fast and ate with Salman. Salman spent that night with Abu-Darda, and Abu Darda got up during the night to offer some night prayers whereupon Salman stopped him from doing so, saying: 'Your body has certain rights upon you, your Lord has certain rights upon you, and your family has certain rights upon you. Fast some days and break the fast on others, approach your spouse (for marital relations). Grant everyone their due right.' Just before the break of dawn, Salman permitted Abu-Darda to get up and offer prayers. Both of them rose, performed ablution, offered prayers and then headed to the Masjid to offer Fajr (dawn) prayer. Upon finishing the prayer with the Prophet of Allah ﷺ Abu-Darda reported to the Prophet about the incident. The Prophet of Allah ﷺ said: 'Salman has spoken the truth.'" [Bukhari]

Considering the needs of his wife, a husband should not be away from home for an extended period of time. Caliph Umar ibn Al-Khattab, after consulting with his daughter Hafsa about the length of the period a woman can patiently bear her husband's absence, set this period at six months.

Abdur-Razaq and others narrated a famous story that:

“Umar ibn al-Khattab was making night rounds when he heard a woman lament:



‘The night has grown long, and its end is dark and black, I am sleepless since I have, with whom to play, no lover,

If there was not (the Lord) whose Throne is above the Heavens, the sides of this bed, would roll, shake and quiver!’

In the morning he went to her and asked her the reason for her poetry, and she answered that her husband had gone with the soldiers on a long campaign. Umar then conferred with his daughter Hafsa on how long a woman can be patient for her husband to return. After some moments of hesitation and embarrassment, in which he convinced her that this question was for the general good of the Muslims, she replied six months.”

After this, Umar would close a campaign within six months so that they could return to their wives within that time.

This period is approximate since circumstances may allow it to be less, or force it to be more. She may tolerate the absence of her husband for more than six months, or she may demand him to come back before that time.

The husband may not refuse or deny his spouse's legitimate request unless he has a valid excuse. A husband must not make any financial decisions on behalf of his spouse unless she gives him such permission. The husband has no right to take any of his spouse's financial assets without her approval.

He should also consult his spouse in the major household decisions, children's affairs and other mutual affairs. It is not wise to dictate a man's opinion upon the other members of the family without listening to the spouse's opinion, as long as her opinion is wise and correct.

Allah's Prophet ﷺ gave us a practical example in this matter. On the "Day of the Pact" with the Quraish tribe, the Prophet ﷺ commanded his companions to shave their heads and to exit the state of "Ihraam", but they were slow and did not hasten to fulfill his command. Um Salamah, the Prophet's wife, recommended that he do so himself and then go out before his companions. Allah's Prophet acted upon the recommendation of his wife, doing what she suggested, and when the companions saw his action they all hastened in obedience.

A husband must avoid counting every innocent mistake his spouse may make. For instance, the Prophet of Allah ﷺ said:

"A husband should not come to his home from a journey late at night (without announcing his arrival in advance)." [Bukhari & Muslim]

This recommendation is given so that the wife may have time to comb her hair or wash herself and that the husband may not find his spouse in an unprepared state, which might become a reason for his displeasure. Of course with the modern facilities, nowadays husbands have the ability to inform their wives well in advance, whether the arrival is during the daytime or late in the night.

It is the obligation of a husband to be kind, attentive, sharing and caring with his spouse. He must demonstrate honesty, decency, patience and care, and must take into consideration her human nature. Women appreciate being loved tenderly and being well taken care of. A husband must demonstrate his affection, love, appreciation, caring, consideration and genuine keenness of his spouse.

The system of divorce in Islam is designed to protect the rights and

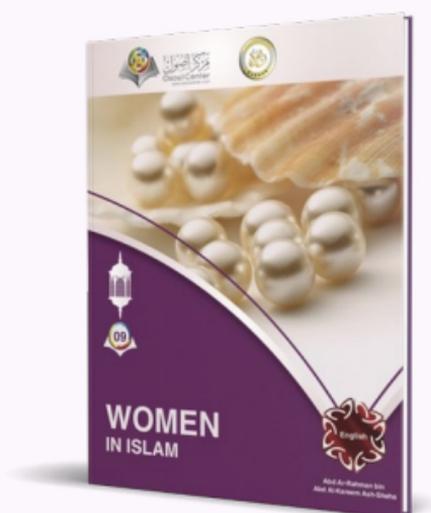
interests of the woman, and allow ample opportunity and time for reconciliation. We will discuss in more detail below, but here we only mention that in divorce, as in marriage, one must act decent with civil behavior to assure the right of both parties, as Allah, the Most Wise, says:

“Divorce is two times. Then, either keep [her] in an acceptable manner or release [her] with good treatment.” [2:229]



This is an excerpt  
of a larger book titled  
**“Women in Islam”**  
by Abd Ar- Rahman  
bin Abd Al-Kareem Ash-Sheha.

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