

Islam and Women: Marriage

What should a Muslim man look for in a woman to marry? Muhammad said

The best women [sic] is she who when you look at her, she pleases you, when you command her she obeys you, and when you are absent, she protects her honor and your property.

Tafsir Ibn Kathir, Vol. 2, p. 443

And in the *sahih hadith* below, Muhammad and some of the early Muslim rulers showed that the woman was completely uninvolved in the choice of whom she was to marry. 'Umar (who became the second Caliph) wanted to marry off his daughter, Hafsa. He offered her to Uthman (who became the third Caliph) and then to Abu Bakr (the first Caliph to succeed Muhammad). Muhammad then "demanded" her hand, and she was married to Muhammad. However, Abu Bakr later assured 'Umar that he would have taken her if Muhammad had changed his mind. All with no input from Hafsa:

Narrated 'Abdullah bin 'Umar: 'Umar bin Al-Khattab said, "When (my daughter) Hafsa bint 'Umar lost her husband... I met 'Uthman bin 'Affan and suggested that he should marry Hafsa saying, 'If you wish, I will marry Hafsa bint 'Umar to you.' On that, he said, 'I will think it over.' I waited for a few days and then he said to me, 'I

am of the opinion that I shall not marry at present.' Then I met Abu Bakr and said, 'If you wish, I will marry you Hafsa bint 'Umar.' He kept quiet and did not give me any reply and I became more angry with him than I was with 'Uthman. Some days later, Allah's Messenger demanded her hand in marriage and I married her to him. Later on, Abu Bakr met me and said, 'Perhaps you were angry with me when you offered me Hafsa for marriage and I gave no reply to you?' I said, 'Yes.' Abu Bakr said, 'Nothing prevented me from accepting your offer except that I learnt that Allah's Messenger had referred to the issue of Hafsa; and I did not want to disclose the secret of Allah's Messenger, but had he (i.e. the Prophet) given her up I would surely have accepted her.'"

Sahih Al-Bukhari, No. 4005

So, in terms of marriage, even the daughter of a future caliph was considered nothing more than a piece of property by Muhammad and the early Muslim leaders.

The “Rights” of the Wife

A man asked Muhammad

"O Messenger of Allah! What are the rights that our wives have over us?" He replied: "That you feed her when you eat, and clothe her when you wear clothes, and that you avoid hitting her in the face, or disgracing her, and that you avoid abandoning her except at home."

Sunan Abu Dawud, No. 2142

And according to Chapter 2, Verse 221 of the Koran, it is unlawful for a Muslim woman to be married to anyone besides a Muslim male. But the Koran allows Muslim men to marry Jewish and Christian women (5:5).

The Koran also allows a Muslim man to have up to four wives (4:3), but a Muslim woman can have only one husband.

Once a Muslim woman is married, her husband gains a tremendous amount of control over her. As Muhammad said:

If I were to command anyone to prostrate before anyone, I would have commanded the wife to prostrate before her husband, because of the enormity of his right upon her.

Tafsir Ibn Kathir, Vol. 2, p. 444

In the first instance, the new bride loses control of any personal finances she might have:

It was narrated from 'Amr bin Shu'aib, from his father, from his grandfather, that the Messenger of Allah said: "It is not permissible for a woman to give a gift from her wealth, once her husband has marital authority over her."

Sunan An-Nasa'i, No. 3787

And another matter of concern is that her husband is allowed to beat her – see the brochure *Islam and Women: Beating Your Wives*.

Prepubescent Marriage

An unusual concept for Western minds is the idea of prepubescent boys and girls being married, even to each other. This is acceptable under Sharia Law. And, in terms of girls, prepubescent marriage is acknowledged in a verse of the Koran which deals with the 'iddah, the prescribed waiting period for a woman before she can marry again after a divorce or the death of her husband:

Chapter 65, Verse 4

And those of your women as have passed the age of monthly courses, for them the 'Iddah (prescribed period), if you have doubt (about their periods), is three months; and for those who have no courses [(i.e. they are still immature) their 'Iddah (prescribed period) is three months likewise...

And the example was set by Muhammad. Although you might still find Muslims who deny this, it is well documented in authoritative Islamic sources that at about age 50 Muhammad married Aisha when she was only six years old; he consummated the marriage when Aisha was nine. Aisha talked about the day her marriage was consummated in Medina:

The Messenger of God came to our house and men and women of the Ansar gathered around him. My mother came to me while I was being swung on a swing between two branches and got me down. Jumaymah, my nurse, took over and wiped my face with some water and started leading me. When I was at the door, she stopped so I could catch my breath. I was then brought [in] while the

Messenger of God was sitting on a bed in our house. [My mother] made me sit on his lap and said, "These are your relatives. May God bless you with them and bless them with you!" Then the men and women got up and left. The Messenger of God consummated his marriage with me in my house when I was nine years old.

The History of al-Tabari: The Last Years of the Prophet, pp. 130-131

Aisha also stated that she took her dolls with her when she went to Muhammad's house as a nine-year-old bride, and her playmates would come to the house and play (*Sahih Muslim*, No. 1422R2).

Divorce

In terms of divorce, under Sharia Law the husband is in control. The major schools are in agreement that the husband is the divorcer and the wife is the divorcee, the recipient of the divorce.

The four Sunni schools of Sharia Law state that if a divorced woman has custody of a child from the previous marriage, she loses her right to that custody if she then marries a man who is unrelated to that child; however, if the man is related to the child, the woman retains custody. The Jafaris (Shia school) believe that when a woman remarries, she automatically loses custody of any child from the previous marriage.

Dr. Kirby is the author of five books on Islam. His latest book is *The Lure of Fantasy Islam: Exposing the Myths and Myth Makers*. His books are available on Amazon.com.



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By Dr. Stephen M. Kirby

IslamSeries@gmail.com

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