

The Rights of the Spouses

Husband and wife are the basic building block of a society that is why Islam places lots of stress on its correction. In the Quran Allah says: O Prophet, enjoin the Believing men to restrain their gaze and guard their private parts, and not to display their adornment except that which is displayed of itself, and to draw their veils over their bosoms and not to display their adornment except before their husbands, their fathers, the fathers of their husbands, their sons and the step sons of their husbands, their brothers, their brothers' sons, their sisters' sons, their female associates and those in their possession and male attendants incapable of sexual desire and those boys who have not yet attained knowledge of sex matters concerning women; also forbid them to stamp their feet on the ground lest their hidden ornaments should be displayed. O Believers, turn all together towards Allah: it is expected that you will attain true success (24:31).

In another verse Allah says: Men are the protectors and maintainers of women because Allah has made one of them excel over the other, and **because they spend out of their possessions** (to support them) (4:34).

Allah has ordained certain set of duties and responsibilities upon the believing men and women, which include the rights and duties of husbands and wives. To create a balance, both husband and wife enjoy their own well-defined rights in their own capacities, as quoted in the verse: “**And the women have rights over their husbands similar to those of their husbands over them to what is reasonable, but men have a degree over them (being the bread winner)**” (2:228).

Just as women enjoy a set of rights upon her husband, similarly, husbands also possess certain rights over his wife in return. Islam has set rules or rights for both husband and wife. The purpose of rights is to enable a family to run smoothly. The rights can be compromised with each other's consent. Islam places the sole responsibility of providing

food, shelter and clothing on the husband, and thus has been made the head of the family.

According to the marriage contract, the husband must give his wife the agreed dowry. Allah says: Give women their bridal-due in good cheer (considering it a duty); but if they willingly remit any part of it, consume it with good pleasure (4:4). The Prophet(SAW) said, fix the dowry in such a way that it is not too low that the woman loses her worth, and it should not be too high that the husband cannot pay. It should be set according to the status of the husband to be.

The Rights of Husbands

In Islam the rights of husband are not many, being the sole bread winner, he is the head of the family. Just as the wife enjoys the right to kind behavior from her husband, the husband also has the right to receive good and kind treatment from his wife. If there is no mutual kindness and respect between a husband and wife, there can be no companionship or understanding, which will eventually result in the decaying of the marriage (which Satan loves).

The husband and the wife should both implement and practice compassion, forgiveness, and gentleness in their relationship, creating a healthy and loving environment for themselves and their children. Men are warned in the following hadith: Jabir(RA) narrates that the Prophet(SAW) in his Farewell Sermon said: “Fear Allah concerning women! Verily, you have taken them in the name of Allah, and intercourse with them has been made lawful for you by words of Allah. You too have rights over them, and that they should not allow anyone to sit on your bed (i.e., nor let them into the house), whom you do not like. But if they do so, you can chastise them but not severely. Their rights upon you are that you should provide them with food and clothing in a befitting manner” (Muslim, 1218).

i) Abu Hurairah(RA) narrates that the Prophet said: “When a man calls his wife to his bed and she refuses, and he goes

to sleep angry with her, the angels will curse her until morning” (Muslim, 1436). The main justification behind this is so that the husband does not commit illegal sex. The Prophet said: “The best woman is the one, when you look at her, you are pleased; when you order her, she obeys; if you are away from her, she guards herself and your property” (Tabrani).

- ii) Another right of the husband over his wife is that the husband can ask his wife not to do voluntary acts of worship, other than the obligatory, so that he can spend more time with her (again to prevent him from looking elsewhere). The Prophet_(SAW) stated: “A wife is not allowed to observe fast (other than obligatory fasting in the month of Ramadan), unless she has her husband’s permission. She may not allow anyone to come into his house, whom her husband dislikes” (Tirmizi). Umm Salma_(RA), the mother of the believers narrates that the Prophet said: “Any woman whose husband dies while he is pleased, happy and satisfied with her, will enter Paradise” (Tirmizi).
- iii) The wife should love, respect and obey her husband (being the sole bread winner), if it is not in conflict with the commandments of Allah and his messenger. The Prophet said, “If I were allowed to command a person to bow in prostration to another person, I could have commanded a woman to bow down (in obedience and respect, not in worship) to her husband” (Abu Dawood).
- iv) When the husband calls her to bed, she should not refuse without a valid reason.
- v) The wife should remain chaste and should not allow anyone whom the husband dislikes to enter her house (this is to avoid any misunderstandings creeping up between them).
- vi) When the wife intends to go somewhere other than for usual household needs, she must take her husband’s

permission (this is again to avoid any misunderstandings creeping up between them).

vii) The wife should respect her husband's family and vice versa.

viii) A Muslim wife must protect her husband's secrets, honor, dignity and matter of their privacy. She has the responsibility to protect his wealth, guide the children, and does not waste his money, belongings and other aspects of his household, as much as possible. The Prophet(SAW) said: **"The wife is the guardian over the house of her husband and his children"** (Bukhari and Muslim).

The Rights of Wives

The Prophet said: **"Take my advice with regards to women, act kindly towards women, for they were created from rib, and the most curved part of the rib is its uppermost. If you attempt to straighten it, you will break it, and if you leave it alone it will remain crooked; so, act kindly towards women"** (Bukhari & Muslim). The Prophet said, **"He who is deprived of kindness is deprived of goodness"** (Muslim 2592). The Prophet also said, **"Best of you is who is best to his family, and I am best to my family"**.

Islam came to defend women's rights and raise their status in the society which they did not enjoy in any other society. Fourteen centuries ago, Islam prescribed the rights of woman in the categories of mother, sister, wife and daughter.

Islam states that women and men are equal in status and prestige, and that nothing lessens women's status because they are women. In this regard, the Prophet established an important rule when he said: **"Women are counterparts of men"** (Tirmizi 113). He told his companions: **"I urge you to take care of your women"** (Bukhari 4890). He repeated this advice during his farewell pilgrimage when he addressed more than hundred thousand Muslims.

Islam did not stop at preserving woman's right to life only, but it also urged good treatment for them from childhood. The Prophet said: "Whoever treats his daughters generously, they will act for him as a shield from the Hellfire" (Bukhari 5649). The Prophet (SAW) also ordered for the education of daughters. He said: "Any man who has a daughter, whom he educates properly, teaches good manners... will get a double reward" (Bukhari 4795). The Prophet used to allocate a day for women to advise them, remind them and order them to obey Allah (Bukhari 101).

- a) When a girl grows up and becomes an adult (usually 12 to 13 years), Islam gives her the right to accept or reject a husband-to-be. She should not be forced to accept a man whom she does not want. In this regard, the Prophet said: "A woman who has been previously married has more right to her person than her guardian. Similarly, a virgin should also be consulted, and her silence implies her consent" (Muslim 1421). He also said: "A matron should not be given in marriage except after consulting her; and a virgin should not be given in marriage except after her permission." The people asked, O Allah's Messenger, how can we know virgin's permission? He said, her silence (indicates her permission)" (Bukhari 4843).
- b) When a woman becomes wife, Islam urges good treatment for her, as good treatment of woman implies nobleness and kindness. So much so that the Prophet said: "If a man gives water to his wife to drink, he will be rewarded for it".
- c) In a hadith he (SAW) supplicated and said: "O Allah, I declare sinful the one who fail to safeguard the rights of the two weak ones, namely orphans and women". Allah says: O Believers! It is not lawful for you to become heirs to women against their will. It is not lawful that you should put constraint upon them that you may take away anything of what you have given them; (you may not put constraint upon them) unless they are guilty of brazenly

immoral conduct. Live with your wives in a good manner. If you dislike them in any manner, it may be that you dislike something in which Allah has placed much good for you (4:19).

The Prophet(SAW) exemplified kindness, gentleness, and cooperation within his family. In a hadith the Prophet said, “the best of the believers are those who are best in conduct, and the best of them are those who are best to their families, and I am best to my family”. He used to play with them, entertain them, laugh with them, joke with them, eat with them; he used to help them with their chores. When he entered the house, it wasn’t as if a dark cloud had arrived; rather, as Aisha(RA) said, “she has a sun, and the sky has a sun.”

The Mother of the believers Aisha(RA) describes him in Tirmizi, she says that his time with his family was at the service of his family. He would milk the goat and do other house hold chores, and would stay busy serving and helping his house hold, he would repair his own sandals and his own garments etc.

Al-Aswad ibn Yazid Al-NakhI asked Ayesha(RA) about the Prophet's activities at home. She replied that he would serve his family and, when prayer time came, he would go to the mosque to pray.

People of Makkah had a famous love story of a married couple called Abi Zara and Um Zara. It is an Arab tradition that they would call each other with kunai, O father of so and so, O mother of so and so out of respect. The Prophet once said to Ayesha(RA) that his loyalty and love for her is like that of Abi Zara and Um Zara. Ayesha(RA)replied that he is dearer to her than her father and mother and that he is more loyal and loving than the story of Abi Zara and Um Zara. This is an ever-living example for us to follow in matters of our spouses.

- d) The wife can steal money from her stingy husband for her genuine needs, while the husband has no right over her money. Ayesha_(RA) narrates that Hind d/o Utbah, the wife of Abu Sufyaan, came to the Prophet_(SAW) and said, **O' Messenger of Allah, Abu Sufyan is a stingy man who does not spend enough on me and my children, except for what I take from his wealth without his knowledge. Is there any sin on me for doing that? The Prophet said, "Take from his wealth on a reasonable basis, what is sufficient for you and your children"** (i.e. she cannot give charity or to others from it without the husband's consent) (Bukhari, 5049; Muslim, 1714).

It is the husband's responsibility to fulfill wife's legal needs like loving her, caring for her, clothing her, feeding her etc., according to his status. As the husband must take care of all the needs of a family, this gives the husband an edge over his wife and is declared the head of his family. In case of divorce the upbringing of the children solely lies on the shoulder of the father. Allah in verse says: **Whoever has abundant means, let him spend according to his means; and he whose means are straitened, let him spend out of what Allah has given him. Allah does not burden any human being beyond the means that He has bestowed upon him. Possibly Allah will grant ease after hardship** (65:7).

- e) If a wife hates her husband and does not want to live with him, Islam gives her the right to leave her husband through Khula (divorce initiated by wife). Islam also gives her the right to ask for the right of divorce at the time of matrimonial contract. Ibn Abbas_(RA) narrates that the wife of Thabit ibn Qays came to the Prophet_(SAW) and said, O Allah's Messenger, Thabit does not have defects in his character or his religion, but I dislike him and want to divorce him. If I stay with him, I might behave in an un-Islamic manner. On that the Prophet said (to her), "Will you give back the garden which your husband has given you

(as dowry)? She said, “Yes”. Then she gave back the garden to her husband, and the Prophet told him to divorce her.

- f)** In addition to the above, Islam provides for financial independence of women just as men. So, she can buy and sell, rent or lease a property, there is no ban on her if she is intelligent and rational. Allah in verse says: “**If then you find sound judgment in them, release their property to them**” (4:6).

When Um Hani d/o Abu Talib provided asylum for an infidel, while her brother Ali_(RA)) insisted on killing him, the Prophet_(SAW) gave his judgment and said: “**O Um Hani, we will grant asylum to the one whom you have granted asylum**”. So, he gave her the right to grant asylum to the non-Muslim who was being pursued for his transgressions.

Finally, the Prophet advised the men to live with their wives in a good manner. If you dislike them in any way, it may be that you dislike something in which Allah has placed much good for you. The scholars from different hadiths have formulated the following:

- i)** Husband must pay her dowry according to his status.
- ii)** All wedding arrangements and cost are to be borne by the bridegroom to be and his family.
- iii)** If she cooks food, she is doing her husband a favor. In Islam we are supposed to appreciate the meal cooked by our wives and it is prohibited to complain about it.

On this I remembered a joke which Mufti Menk usually mentions in His lecture. A man went to a mosque where the scholar gave a lecture and stressed on men to appreciate their wives cooking. It motivated a man who decided that from now on he will appreciate his wife’s cooking and pass good comments about the food. When the food was laid, he put a piece in his mouth and smilingly said, “Wow very tasty”. The wife got aroused, she said, “I have been cooking for you for the past forty

years, and you never appreciated my food, today the food came from the neighbors, you are appreciating it!”

- iv)** Husband should not un-necessarily scold his wife, because she is his other half.
- v)** If she looks after the children, she is doing him a favor.
- vi)** If she wishes, she has the right to independent lodging.
- vii)** If she takes care of her parents-in-law, she is doing him a favor.
- viii)** If the husband is stingy, she can steal from him to meet her genuine needs, while husband can't.
- ix)** The Prophet(SAW) said that Eve was produced from Adam's ribs, ribs are curved and similarly are women. Do not try to straighten them, you will break them (i.e. their spirit, thus will be held accountable), accept them as they are.
- x)** Husband should help his wife with her household chores. The Prophet used to help his family in household chores.
- xi)** Men are responsible for caring for both their immediate family (wife and children) and their parents.
- xii)** If a woman becomes a widow or is divorced, it's her father's or male sibling's responsibility to take care of her.

After writing all this, I was wondering why women are protesting for their rights, of what little I have written so far, it should be the other way around. To console the men, I can only say to them, even the companions of the Prophet complained that the women have become rebellious.

I would like to end this topic in a lighter note with 2nd joke mentioned in a lecture of scholar Mufti Menk. A man listened to a lecture in a mosque, and when he came back to his house, he said to his wife, “Darling I want to pick you up”. Surprised, she said, “I am heavy”. He said it doesn't matter. After being lifted, the wife asked, “What is this all

about”? He said, “I heard the scholar say that on the Day of Judgment everyone will carry his own load?” O men, keep them happy so that they are not too heavy a load for us on the Judgment Day.

O men, it is due to this that the Prophet(SAW) said, if it was allowed to prostrate to anyone else besides God, I would have asked the wife to prostrate to her husband for the hassle. In my opinion, despite all the propaganda of suppression of women in Islam, due to the above facts, two third of the reverts in Europe and America are women.

O Muslims, the basic building block of a society are the spouses. That is why Islam places great emphases on husband and wife having a good relationship with each other. The effect of this would be that good attitudes will filter down to their children and to society in general.

In a hadith the Prophet told us that the dearest act of injustice in the eyes of Satan is creating suspicion between husband and wife. The destruction of the basic building block would ultimately mean the destruction of the society. When asked about the Prophet's demeanor at home, Ayesha(RA) described him as gentle, the kindest of men, always smiling and cheerful. He assisted them with household chores, mended his own clothes and shoes, and milked the goat.