

THE HUSBAND WIFE RELATIONSHIP IN ISLAM

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THE GENERAL GUIDELINES

The following general guidelines must be adhered to always in a marriage and they must act as the background for the specific guidelines dealt with in the next section.

*“And among His signs is that He created mates for you from yourselves that you may find **comfort and repose** in them, and He put between you **love and compassion**; most surely there are signs in this for a people who reflect.” (30:21)*

- Allah has indeed created man and woman to be the natural counterparts of the other, they are natural companions.
- Allah has destined that they will find comfort and repose with one another.
- Finally Allah tells us that he has put love and compassion between them.

These indeed are signs for us.

The first foundation for a Muslim marriage is Islam.

The second foundation of a Muslim marriage is that the physical, emotional and mental bonding and companionship must be firmly based upon love and compassion, only then can husband and wife truly find comfort in one another.

The above are what a man and a woman must seek to maintain in their lives in order to fulfil Allah’s destiny for his creation.

*“It is He Who created you from a single self and made from him his spouse so that he might **find rest in her/dwell with her**. Then when he covered her she bore a light load and carried it around. Then when it became heavy they called on Allah, their Lord, ‘If You grant us a healthy child, we will be among the thankful!’” (7:189)*

- The husband should find rest and tranquillity in his wife.

The wife should seek to be a source of calm and rest for her husband.

- They join, she conceives and they make a dua.

“On the night of the fast it is lawful for you to have sexual relations with your wives. They are clothing/covering (libaas) for you and you for them” (2:187)

- Libaas is used for the covering term above, in this context it would seem to imply intimacy and closeness, concealment of faults, confidentiality and an adornment for one another. We act as a covering and protection for each other from fornication and any other such danger by sexually fulfilling one another.

It is clear that husband and wife must seek to sexually fulfil each other whenever needed in order to remove that need or want from one another, in this way can they help one another.

And those who pray, "Our Lord! Grant unto us wives and offspring who will be the comfort of our eyes, and give us (the grace) to lead the righteous." (25:74)

Wives should aim to be a comfort and pleasure to their husband's eyes.

“They question you concerning menstruation. Say: It is an annoyance/hurt/uncleanliness, So keep away from women in their courses, and do not approach them (sexually) until they are clean. And when they have purified themselves, then come to them them as Allah has commanded you. Truly Allah loves those who turn unto Him, and loves those who have a care for cleanness.

Your women are a حَرْثٌ (tilth) for you, so come to حَرْثِكُمْ (your tilth) however you like. Send good ahead for yourselves and have fear of Allah. Know that you are going to meet Him. And give good news to the believers.” (2:222-223)

The context of these verses is undoubtedly referring to sexual relations between the husband and wife.

From 2:222 we can see intercourse should be avoided when women are menstruating, however once the menstruation has ended and the woman has cleansed herself then intercourse is fine again. It is clear that this is specifically referring to intercourse and the impurity that can be associated with it during the menstrual period. It says nothing of other physical contact, so the idea that women should be apart or be deprived of any physical contact during the menstrual period has no basis.

Verse 2:223 indicates a few things: -

- The analogy of the wife as a tilth for the husband reflects the simple reality wherein the husband 'sows' his seed and wife brings forth a return in terms of a child.
- It implies that a husband can approach his wife sexually however he likes.
- Husband and wife are reminded that they must send good before them and fear Allah and know that they will meet him.

The wife should be receptive to her husband and his needs, and the husband should remember Allah to purify his mind before intercourse.

“You who believe! It is not lawful for you to inherit women by force. Nor may you treat them harshly so that you can make off with part of what you have given them, unless they commit an act of flagrant indecency. Live together with them correctly and courteously. If you dislike them, it may well be that you dislike something in which Allah has placed a lot of good.” (4:19)

Men are commanded not to treat their wives harshly for the purpose of getting back anything they have given them, unless they commit a clear ‘fahisha’, like adultery of any type etc...

- They must instead live with their wives in a correct and courteous manner.
- In fact, Allah tells us that if men dislike something in their wives then they should bear with it as Allah may have placed all of good in it.

Consider for example a verse in the context of divorce, a hard time in which anger, sorrow, resentment etc... are powerful emotions: -

“Let the women live (in ‘iddat) in the same style as ye live, according to your means: Annoy them not, so as to restrict them. And if they carry (life in their wombs), then spend (your substance) on them until they deliver their burden: and if they suckle your (offspring), give them their recompense: and take mutual counsel together, according to what is just and reasonable. And if ye find yourselves in difficulties, let another woman suckle (the child) on the (father’s) behalf.”* (65:6)

*the waiting period before final divorce or when cancellation of divorce process can take place.

Even with the context of a painful divorce the husband must not annoy his wife, furthermore he should consult with her on relevant issues. If this is what is expected at such times, how much more within the context of a loving marriage?

In fact from the very basic fact of consultation that Allah requires of Muslims we can understand the need for it in the marriage relationship, consider: -

“Those who hearken to their Lord, and establish regular Prayer; who (conduct) their affairs by mutual Consultation; who spend out of what We bestow on them for Sustenance;” (42:38)

That affairs are conducted by consultation is seen from this verse to be an important quality of the Muslim character.

THE SPECIFIC GUIDELINES

“Men are the protectors/guardians and maintainers of women, because Allah has given the one more than the other, and because they support them from their means. Therefore/so the righteous women are devoutly obedient (to the husband), and guard in (the husband's) absence what Allah would have them guard. As to those women on whose part ye fear disloyalty and ill-conduct (nushuz), admonish them (first), (Next), refuse to share their beds, (And last) separate from them; **but if they obey you**, seek not against them Means (of annoyance): For Allah is Most High, great (above you all).” (4:34)*

*This understanding is justified below (portions used from Ahmad Shafaat).

- Men are the guardians and maintainers of women, this is the decree of Allah that must be established if at all possible. That is, this is how Allah decrees that it should be. It is not for men, women or society at large to dictate otherwise.
- Women are therefore required to be devoutly obedient to their husbands, in that they should seek to obey them in matters that are not forbidden. This is distinct from slavishly obedient which would imply absolute obedience of any command be it right or wrong. We can notice that because of the underlined ‘therefore/so’ that it is as a result of the role of the husband that the wife owes him this kind of obedience, and of course the guarding in the husbands absence what Allah would have them guard.
 - Since men are guardians and maintainers of their wives, they must have some authority to make decisions, for a husband cannot be an effective guardian or maintainer of his wife without having some decision-making authority. And whenever there is legitimate decision-making authority on one side, there is a legitimate necessity for obedience from the other.
 - If we look at the last part in bold we see that if the woman returns to obedience then etc... this would imply that the most likely nushuz a wife may do is to be disobedient in a serious manner or a serious matter, as opposed to being unjust or unkind.
- In thinking of husbands as guardians and maintainers of their wives, their roles should not be limited to mere protectors and providers. Properly taking care of women requires more than ensuring their physical security and providing food and shelter. It also requires looking after their psychological and emotional needs that can be summed up in terms of the need for love (30:21). Thus the husband's role in the marriage relationship generally consists of three things: protecting the woman, looking after her economic needs and giving her love.
- With respect to the women, "Guarding (in husband's) absence what God has (willed to be) guarded" means guarding the husband's honour and property as

well as the wife's own loyalty towards him. "Even though out of sight" refers to the husband's honour and property when he is absent (when working) as well as her modesty and chastity with all other men. Thus in return for the love, security and financial support that the husband should give his wife, the righteous wife should give her husband love, loyalty, obedience and look after his interests with complete faithfulness.

- This implies that women are not meant to be working, and are hence supposed to be primarily at home (when the husband is working, he is *absent* from the home).
- Consider, what was Allah saying about the husband wife relationship when he says that: -
 - The husband gives her of his wealth.
 - She guards what Allah would have her guard in her husband's absence.
 - The answer is obvious, that she is not working and is primarily at home.
- This is the pattern that Allah is establishing in the Qur'an. It is not to be changed to fit in with feminist or 'modernist' women. To have a career is of no value at all for women Qur'anically. In fact, if a woman chooses to have one when it is not needed, then she is choosing to break the pattern that Allah seeks to establish in this Ayah (and in another later on, 33:33)

It must be clear that the difference in authority in the marital relationship is not indicative of a difference of worth, as Allah clearly states: -

"The nobler among you in the sight of God is the more muttaqi (righteous) among you." (49:13)

It should also be clear that the fulfilment of the wife's responsibilities to her husband is predicated upon the husband actually fulfilling his responsibilities to her as best he can. This is logical, and the So/Therefore linkage used in (4:34) also indicates it.

If we look at the following verse: -

*"Maybe, his Lord, if he divorce you, will give him in your place wives better than you, Muslim, faithful, **devoutly obedient (qanitaat)**, penitent, worshipping, travelling (or emigrating, for Islam), previously married and virgins."* (66:5)

We see that Allah (regarding the wives of the prophet) refers to the quality of being devoutly obedient (to their husband, Muhammad) as distinct to being Muslim, being worshippers of Allah, faithful to Allah etc... Hence it is referring to obedience to Muhammad as a husband. This then being a confirmation to the understanding given in 4:34.

There are some other issues that should be noted. All of the above must be within the context of love and compassion as is defined in the general verses. Let us remember that Allah also specifically tells husbands to be patient with things they don't like about their wives (4:19). This clearly indicating a relationship of compassion, forbearing with faults and love as is indicated by (30:21). Not tyranny and dictatorship.

It is absolutely vital that the general guidelines for husband wife relations are used as the context within which the specific guidelines are understood and practiced.

What is nushuz?

The word means high headedness, rebellion, disobedience, treating unjustly, treating unkindly etc...

It is used in both the context of the husband fearing it from his wife in (4:34) and the wife fearing it from her husband (4:128), in both cases they are followed by a reference to the possible break up of the marriage.

Nushuz can take a number of meanings in the context... The wife could be high headed and decide she is better than to be a wife in the home and to respect her obligations to her husband and as such rebel against the will of Allah for her. She could of course be treating her husband unjustly and/or unkindly.

The husband could be acting unkindly and unjustly with his wife and he could be rebelling against his obligations to her and as such rebelling against the will of Allah for him.

I believe nushuz is a general term for something, which the spouse does that they shouldn't do or something they don't do that they should both being as a result of disrespect or rebellion, which makes the marriage very difficult and hence allows the consideration of divorce.

"Women for whom the process of divorce has begun (begun by the husband) should wait by themselves for three menstrual cycles; and it is not lawful for them to conceal what Allah has created in their wombs if they believe in Allah and the Last Day. Their husbands **have the right to take them back** within that time, if they desire to be reconciled. **Women possess rights similar to those held over them (i.e., their obligations) to be honoured with fairness; but men have a degree above them (in both rights and obligations). Allah is Almighty, All-Wise.**" (2:228)*

*That is at the start of the iddah or waiting period.

- This verse implies that men have been given both more obligations and rights with respect to their wives. That is, the husbands have a degree above their wives in responsibilities to and rights from their wives.
- (4:34) explains these rights and obligations to some extent.

- In the verse itself is an example of the husband exercising this right, namely if the husband starts the divorce process and wife is in the waiting period, the husband has the right to take her back if he chooses to reconcile.

If we even look at the institution of marriage, we can see a differentiation in some aspects: -

- Both spouses have the same obligations to provide physical, emotional, psychological and spiritual happiness to each other, but men generally have the added obligation of providing for the economic needs of the wife. And the wife has the reciprocal obligation of guarding the property, honour etc... of the husband along with being properly obedient.
- In case the husband initiates divorce, he is obliged by religious law to pay some maintenance expenses (2:241). This prescribed payment belongs to the wife by right. However, when the woman initiates the divorce she does not pay any compensation to the husband as requirement of religious law; she need at most return part of what she received from the husband as dower if such payment is helpful in an amicable settlement. (2:229)

These are some reflections of the differing rights and obligations of the marriage partners.

The fact that husbands' rights are a degree greater does not effect the claim that in Islam men and women are equal before Allah, since men's greater rights within the marriage relationship do not mean that men also enjoy greater rights outside that relationship, because within the marriage relationship men's greater rights are completely justified by the greater responsibility given to them by Allah.

We must remember here that whenever we talk about members of a society having equal rights that members of that society freely enter into arrangements in which some take greater responsibility and therefore also have greater rights and authority, this is how companies work. Equality of rights can only be asserted on the assumption of equality of responsibility.

Islamically wealth or the ability to order people around does not make you more of a person than a street cleaner, it is only the person's Islam that determines this. Hence just because the husband has more rights and authority in the marriage relationship, it does not make him more than his wife. It is merely an arrangement for the partnership decreed by Allah.

Let us not forget that women who work obey their manager's commands for the sake of money, yet they feel irritated when Allah commands them to obey their husbands as a religious obligation. This shows that they care for dunya more than Akhirah.

Women should make sure they can and will fulfil their obligations to their husbands if they are going to marry.

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- i There are as far as I can see 2 ways to understand حَرْث in this context (though it has more meanings). (1) Gain or acquisition, recompense or reward; a lot, share or portion; worldly goods. (2) A place (ploughed) for sowing. If we use this meaning, then it would be understood (as found with modification in Lane's Lexicon) as: "Your wives/women are (those) wherein you sow your offspring". This meaning of the word (i.e., tilth) seems to be the meaning universally used in translations. The first meaning does not make sense firstly in the sense that women are nowhere else in the Qur'an described in such terms and secondly it does not befit the honour that Allah gives to humanity for a woman to be described in the same terms as objects or goods. The second meaning fits well into the context of both 2:222 and 2:223.