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by [G. A. Parwez](#)

translated by Mrs. Suraiya Alvi

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## [Home](#) **Preface**

### *In the name of Allah, the Rahman, the Raheem*

This book is the English translation of the Urdu book of the same name, written during the early 1950's by the great Quranic scholar of the sub-continent, Chaudhri Ghulam Ahmad Parwez. Mr. Parwez's immense philosophical work is a realization of the desire of Allama Iqbal - the renowned Muslim visionary who developed and propagated a penetrating insight into the nature of Islam- to study Islam not as a religion but as a Deen, a word which has no parallel in western languages. Mr. Parwez's studies on the meaning of Deen forms the core of the present work, as well as his numerous treatises, lectures, discourses and books, including his fascinating exposition on the Quran (in thirty parts), and his modern Quranic Lexicon (in four volumes). His revolutionary writings and discourses have inspired a widespread intellectual movement in Pakistan, both among the intelligentsia and the common people, and is increasingly influencing similar thinking in other countries.

"Letters to Tahira" is essentially a collection of letters written to a mature and inquisitive young lady with clean intellect. This was in response to the queries the author had received from many of the female readers of his earlier similar book, "Letters to Saleem", which included a series of letters addressed to the youth of Pakistan and world at large.

In this book Mr. Parwez has written exclusively on various matters concerning Muslim girls and women, particularly in the Indian sub-continent and, in a simple but effective way in the light of the Quran, has presented explanations and responses to their worries and concerns.

There has been a demand from various circles that this book be translated into English for the English-speaking public in the sub-continent, and the world at large. This task was taken over by our sister in United States, Mrs. Surraya Alvi. The credit for the basic translation goes to her. The book was subsequently given to me for review. This was a very difficult task, to say the least. I had to take help from my friend and devoted student of the Quran, Bashir Ahmed Abid. Once the basic conceptual work was done, I was assisted by my colleague Aziz Mamuji, who helped me in streamlining and editing the text. The final draft was scrutinised by Muneer Chughtai, a friend, well versed in Tolu-e-Islam literature. I hope that the readers will like the work, and I pray that it may fulfil the purpose it was meant to serve.

In the ensuing translation of "Letters to Tahira", we have as far as possible, faithfully rendered into English the relevant Quranic verses. However, we have avoided giving the Arabic text. They can be referred to in the Quran by readers themselves. Also, the Urdu poetic stanzas that so effectively embellish Parwez's writings have been sparingly used. A few that could be freely translated have been attempted.

The main objective of this exercise is to be faithful, as mentioned above, to the conceptual meaning of the text as Parwez delineated it.

This book assumes that the reader has a general knowledge about Islam. For our non-Muslim friends, it is recommended that they study [Islam: A Challenge to Religion](#), written in English by the same author, to understand the overall concept of Islam.

**Ubedur Rahman Arain**

Kuwait, June 1996

## [Home](#) Introduction

### *In the name of Allah, the Rahman, the Raheem*

The Quran tells us to nurture the up coming young roots, if we want to reclaim or revive a downtrodden nation. If the rationale of our younger generations is properly guided and their desires and motives are channeled in the right direction, then a nation can certainly rejuvenate itself. Keeping this reality in mind, my foremost attention has been on the young generation of the nation. Whatever I have written is primarily for them. In this regard the "Letters to Saleem" are of special importance. Saleem represents our educated youth who are eager to learn but who, through the wrong education which they get in our schools and colleges, in their minds have doubts and suspicions regarding Deen. The letters tried to dispel these doubts in the light of scientific analysis, Quranic truth and rational wisdom. As such, these letters prove to be quite effective and useful. A while ago, a dear friend of mine suggested that like the "Letters to Saleem", I start a separate series called "Letters to Tahira", which should especially deal with problems facing women. This suggestion proved so useful that after publishing the first letter, I received hundreds of letters from daughters and sisters all over the country appreciating and praising this new series. One of the advantages was that the questions asked covered a wide range of topics, and the rest of the letters published were then based mostly on these queries.

There had been a demand for some time that a collection of "Letters to Tahira" be published, like its predecessor book "Letters to Saleem". This book is thus a response to that demand. First I considered including all these letters in one volume, but later I felt that there are other vital matters that should necessarily form a part of such of collection. When thinking of other material for inclusion in the book, the need of collating all such Quranic directive that particularly concern women, was highlighted. These are now presented in this book, under different headings, so that whenever needed one could easily look up the required reference. I have arranged all these laws for easy reference, but while this has enhanced the usefulness of this collection, it has resulted in a thick volume. I, therefore, have had to divide it into two volumes.

These letters bring forth the trials, tribulations and those vexing problems that the unfortunate and helpless girls of our society have to face today. The solutions to such problems have been presented in the light of the Quran. The solutions to these are obviously applicable to the society does not correct itself, one cannot get satisfactory solutions to these difficulties. In fact, there are two effective ways of making a just society. Firstly, the education in our schools and colleges should be based on the correct lines and secondly, the laws of the land should be formulated in the light of the Quran. For this purpose it is necessary to awaken public opinion to such an extent that the changes can be effected in a constitutional manner.

Through a study of these letters it will be evident that the laws about marriage and divorce, as formulated by the so called *Sharia*, are often quite contrary to Quranic teachings. Quite often the prevalent *Sharia* directives, which are sometimes used in legal judgement, contain violations of the Quranic concepts.

We are Muslims and our conviction about the Quran is that it is a complete code of life given to us by Allah. Therefore, anything that goes against the Quran cannot be correct. What we need is to bring our *Sharia* to completely conform to the Quran, and this can be done by applying the approach mentioned above.

Some letters highlight those maladies that are currently rampant amongst our modern educated class. These are the results of following the 'West' blindly. The nation is gradually being pushed towards destruction, and if the orthodox section of the society needs to change, the modernists, too, are not to be exempted. If the former is a patient of paralysis, the latter has had a stroke. It is

imperative that both extremes be brought to the middle path, in the light of the Quran.

Sex is a very important subject because it is deeply linked with civilization and the culture of a nation. Precious little has been written about this subject, and so I want to talk about this in a manner which explains its importance. With this aim in mind, a research paper on this subject has been included in the second part, which explains why the Quran emphasizes chastity and the purity of thought and deed.

It is a fact that women can 'train' a society more easily and effectively than men. Society consists of an aggregate of different families, and it is a woman who can effectively and beautifully set her home right. The publishing of these letters will hopefully initiate the reformation process at home. If this effort of mine can light a few Quranic candles in some homes, I believe my endeavours will have borne fruit.

To those sisters who want to start elementary Quranic education in their homes, I would suggest to them my book "Islami Muaashrat" which is available in English from Tolu-e-Islam Trust, under the title 'Islamic Way of Living'. Children should be made to study it, lesson by lesson, and then be encouraged to practice it accordingly. This book, in an easy and attractive style, portrays Quranic guidance on aspects that concern our everyday life. Thereafter, girls can go on to study "Tahira Kay Naam" and both male and female college students can read "Saleem Kay Naam". These will give their thinking an Islamic foundation.

Finally, I should emphasize that I would love to satisfy any doubt or answer any question regarding any subject discussed in these letters. For me, every girl of our nation is my daughter "Tahira."

*Parwez*  
*January 1957, Karachi*  
*(Second Edition)*

## **Preface to the Second (Urdu) Edition**

The first edition of this book was published in two volumes. This second edition, with changes by the author, is being published in one volume. All concerned aspects have been covered in their entirety.

*Gulberg, Lahore.*  
*Nazim, Idara Tolu-e-Islam*  
*April 1969, (Second Edition)*

## **Preface to the Fourth (Urdu) Edition**

The fourth new edition of this book includes the last letter to Tahira which Mr. Parwez wrote in June 1984. This brings together the Quranic education, on aspects which our sisters and daughters have to face in their married lives.

February 1989

## [Home](#) **Status of Men and Women**

### *First Letter to Tahira*

Dear daughter Tahira,

May you have a long life! I want to bless you with a wish that you may happily live to see your progeny flourish and prosper. Firstly, you will ask what this wish means. Even if I tell you that it is an affectionate blessing, you will ask the meaning of 'blessing.' If one has to ask for such a meaning, the wish loses its charm and effectiveness. A blessing, a subtle humour, and a melody or verse are effective only when they are spontaneously understood and absorbed. If you have to explain their meanings, they lose their spicy charm.

Daughter, I do appreciate all your complaints but whenever I write to Saleem, I always mean that you are included, too. I did not think of you and Saleem separately. But now I know that you are sensitive about it, and consequently I have keenly felt your special sarcasm that I, too, like other people, prefer a son to a daughter and consider a man better than a woman. No Tahira, you have misunderstood. This is simply beyond my imagination, but your sarcasm reflects depth of your vision and sensitivity of your feelings. I appreciate this, because I know if a woman's worthy emotions are not valued, how dangerous she can become. Listen dear daughter, do not ascribe a wrong meaning to this word 'dangerous'. It should be understood in the context I use it. I believe it is not difficult for you to understand the correct meaning of my words, since you have been hearing them a long time. A basic reason for the incompatibilities that have crept into our Muslim society is that man has disregarded the respect-worthy emotions of woman. It is a fact that he has never tried to understand woman. He has never considered her worthy enough of being understood. But has this neglect given him any peace? If your left eye is aching, can your right eye sleep peacefully?

### **Status of Woman under The Prevalent Laws**

Tahira, in your mind you have quite easily concluded that since the "Sharia Laws" (Religious Laws) have been formulated by men, they give them an upper hand and tend to suppress women. There is no doubt that our prevalent "Sharia Laws" would result in the same mess. However, the reason is not as you have understood it. If we consider your reason to be correct, then men 'by nature' are such that they want an upper hand and want to overpower and enslave women. If you remember, I had analyzed this fact in a letter to Saleem, that there is no such thing as 'human nature'. What we call 'Nature' consists of something that he has brought along from his animal life. As far as animals are concerned, you never see a male keeping an upper hand over his female. As such, men cannot have this streak because of their animal instincts. Besides animal instincts, the qualities that manifest in 'human nature' are in fact the result of heredity, circumstances, education and nurturing. Therefore, it would be incorrect to claim that because our "Sharia Laws" have been made by men, they have given women a degraded position in them. Instead, it would be more appropriate to say that these laws had been formulated under such circumstances when tyranny, instead of justice, was the order of the day.

At that time, the 'woman' was hated. Hence, according to these laws and ideas, a woman's status was that of a down-trodden, enslaved and degraded being. These laws relate to our monarchical period and, as I have often repeated before, our prevalent 'Islam', too, was more or less formulated at that time. Life in this period, whether it concerned men or women had coercion as its prominent feature. For example, all the laws formulated at that time reserved all the rights for the ruling class. The ruled had no rights; they could only beg for the royal benevolence. They could not demand anything as of right. According to these laws, the landlord had all the rights, and the tiller of the land was treated as a servant. According to these rules a rich man could get all the luxuries whenever he wanted, and the poor received even their daily bread as a charity. In fact the poor got something, too, but this was only to save the giver from the influence of the evil eye.

So much so that according to these beliefs, a rich man could buy his paradise with his money, but a poor man had to cry and beg for his salvation.

It is so obvious, therefore, that in an environment where such laws and beliefs have been devised even for male subordinates, a woman cannot expect better treatment.

## **Influence of Christianity**

In addition to tyranny, men were full of contempt for women when they made these laws. This had a particular reason.

As I have indicated on several occasions, our prevalent Islam is made up of the customary practices of Jews, the racism and personality cults of Zoroastrians, and the monasticism and priesthood of the Christians.

Christian priesthood had a very unwholesome image of woman. They believed that a woman was the source of all evils, because she was the reason behind poor Adam being expelled from paradise. She was regarded as a demon, because evil existed in the world due to her. Christianity thus regarded woman as the embodiment of all evils, and was, therefore, fit to be abhorred. Based upon this image, Christ's life of celibacy was regarded as the best model. The Christians went so far as to say that a woman did not even have a soul.

This reminds me of an interesting anecdote. We had a man named Prem Singh in our village, who practiced indigenous medicine. He took care of both humans and animals. Once mother had kidney pain and she wanted Prem Singh to prescribe some treatment. He said, "You do not have kidney pain." Since she had suffered this malady many times before, she insisted that it was her kidney aching. On hearing this Prem Singh said, "No Aunt, you do not have kidney trouble because women do not have kidneys." He presumed that men were the only ones having hearts and kidneys. What could mother have said to this quack? She just said to him, "Prem Singh, butcher Mohammad Deen slaughters a she-goat daily, and she has two kidneys just like a he-goat." Prem Singh replied, "Aunt it is different with a she-goat."

As I was saying the hateful Christian image of a woman filtered into Muslim society, too. This happened in the above mentioned cruel society. This was the period in Islamic Culture, during which women were auctioned in the market to be made into concubines, and everyone was free to buy and sell as many as he wanted, whenever he wished to. This business was legitimate according to Sharia; and is still so by the Sharia practiced by 'Mullahs'.

These were the circumstances under which "Sharia laws", were formulated, and which today are called 'Islamic'. To look for human dignity or actual status of women in these laws, is to deceive oneself. To justify these laws or to make them appear authentic, claim such as the following have been concocted: A woman has a defective mind; she was born out of Adam's rib, so like the rib she will remain crooked and if you try to straighten her, she will break but will not become straight; a nation which allows a woman's opinion in matters of state and public life would perish; and so on so forth.

## **Our Moral Code**

On the basis of these beliefs and regulations, when a code of ethics was formulated, women were degraded in it as the following couplets read:

If a woman had a righteous character then she would not be called Zan (which means to beat), but would be called Mazan (meaning do not beat).

What a good thing it was that Jamshed said to his companion, that a woman's proper place is either behind the veil or in grave!

Remain alert even if you have a good woman. One's donkey should be tied securely, for even a friend could be thief.

If you want to hear something in more explicit words, then listen to the Heer of Waris Shah which reflects the society of Punjab and is always quoted like the Quran. I could have sent you a few relevant couplets, but the irony is that if I write some Persian verses, then I have to translate them; and if I say something in your own language, then I have to explain it as well. I do not understand what your schools and colleges are making of your generation? You forget your own language, and you do not learn any other well enough to be able to enjoy it. At least your generation is still tolerable, but I cannot say how the next one is being moulded. But I forget, you and your generation are what we have made; and the future generation, too, will be whatever we will make of it. No one can blame the future generations. The behaviour of children reflects their training, or the lack of it.

## Waris Shah

If a father wants to recite the writings of Waris Shah to his daughter, this could be embarrassing for him. Waris Shah's softest narration for women is that they are "Kanyan" of deceit. The word warrants a bit of analysis. In Surah Al-Yousuf, the famous quote of Zulekha's husband has been mentioned: These women are superb manoeuvrers (12:28). However, we present this saying as if God ordained it Himself. If ever you discuss women, somebody would immediately close the argument by saying, "It is futile to discuss women as God Himself has said: These women are superb manoeuvrers (12:28)." As such, no more reference is needed. Waris Shah, too, brands them as "deceitful" by following this 'revelation' of God. The word "Kanyan" (in Punjabi and Urdu) is essentially derived from an Arabic word "Kaida Kunna". It is, however, a very comprehensive word. You must have seen the cactus, called "Aak" (in Punjabi), generally found in the villages. It bears a fruit which looks like a mango, but which is extremely bitter. Its slightest touch on the tongue can make your whole mouth bitter; if a little gets into the eye, it can turn you blind. This is how you describe a "Kunni". It shows how a deceitful "Kunni" can be, and this is the picture of a woman as presented in our society. She looks like a fruit of paradise, but is extremely poisonous!

This was quotation from Waris Shah who is considered as representing the shallow section of our society, but how about the educated class of our people. They even present statistics to prove that a woman is stupid, uncouth and uneducated. In the first place, for ages you deny woman any access to knowledge, then you present her as uncouth and raw material to prove your point. Remember how from infancy Chinese girls were made to wear iron shoes, and when their feet did not grow, they were presented as proof that they could not even walk. (Before the Revolution it was customary to bind the feet of Chinese women, so that their feet could not grow, thus making it difficult for them to walk.)

## Woman and Quran

All of these, dear daughter Tahira, were the results of the above mentioned laws and moral codes, which were the product of times mentioned above. However, the Muslim criteria of fixing the status of a woman, or man, are neither these social laws nor this moral code. For the Muslims, there is only one standard under the sky, and that is the book of God, which they profess to believe in. What status does the Quran endow for woman? The details are lengthy, but their gist reminds me of a joke which Allama Iqbal used to relate. He would say, "If I were not a Muslim, and I had studied the Quran like an ordinary student, then I would have concluded that this book was written by a woman, who was taking revenge on man, for the usurped rights of her community". If one studies the religions and cultures of the world, it leaves no doubt in one's mind that a woman has been pushed to extreme degradation. On the other hand, in the Quranic study it appears as if she has been favoured

very much. For a start, the Quran has rejected the common belief that God created man (Adam) first and then woman (Eve) was created out of his rib. By now, you must have understood that according to the Quran, this very concept that human beings were created by a special couple called Adam and Eve, is wrong. The Quran, in effect, presents Adam as the representative of mankind or humanity.

## **Birth of a Human**

The theory of evolution tells us that life began with a single cell that later divided itself into two i.e. an ovum and a spermatozoon. The Quran corroborates the same by saying: God created you from a single life cell and from it created its mate (for man a woman and for woman a man) and from them twain (4:1). In other words the single life cell swelled and divided itself into two and this continued until then a great number of men and women inhabited this world. And from them were created many men and women (4:1). You should note that the Quran does not discriminate between men and women by virtue of their genders. Their life source is the same, and they are like two branches of the same origin.

## **Zauj (One of a Pair)**

The Quran calls both man and woman as Zauj; but in Urdu we call a woman the Zauja of a man. We do not call a man the Zauj of a woman. The Quran, however, calls both man and woman, Zauj to each other, meaning companions. Further, it does not say that the woman is a man's Zauj, and that the man is not. God addresses human beings and tells them: He has made Zauj among you (30:21, 42:11). Zauj means a friend and companion; which implies that men and women are each other's friends and companions. Accordingly, Zauj would mean the ones who are complementary to each other. Given this meaning, a man complements a woman, and a woman complements a man. They are Zauj to each other. The Quran has gone to the extent of saying, you are from each other (3:195). Therefore, no individual can call itself complete unilaterally.

After this, the Quran has negated the myth that 'Adam had faltered in the paradise due to a woman'. The belief of Satan trapping the woman and then the woman tempting Adam, who sinned and was then kicked out of paradise was rejected as has been mentioned in Torah of Jews. The Quran says that both man and woman are capable of compliance or defiance of laws; both can err and commit mistakes. Therefore, it said: Satan misguided both of them (2:36). Hence it is wrong to surmise that woman is responsible for all the sins committed in this world, and that the man is completely innocent.

## **Both Man and Woman are Respectable**

Having seen the negative stance, let us explore the positive angle. The Quran ordains: Verily We have made humankind worthy of respect (17:70). This reference is not only for man, but for woman also. In the norms of the Arabic language when one wants to mention both men and women together, would say "Bani so and so". In the Quran, "Bani Israel" does not mean only men of Israel, but both men and women. Similarly when the Quran tells us: We created humans with aesthetic balance (95:4), this includes both men and women. The Quran always collectively addresses human beings, and not just men.

## **The Quranic Aim**

By the way this point should make you understand the aim of the Quran, viz.:

(i) To develop human potentialities and to harmonize them in a balanced way. (Balance here means the appropriate and proper weight. Whatever weight anything is supposed to have, it should have just that. Everyone knows the importance of the exact or the correct weight of an ingredient in a doctor's prescription;)

(ii) The society in which people have to deal with each other should be balanced;

(iii) Humans and the forces of nature should also strike a harmonious balance.

In other words, the purpose of human life is to establish a balance. Now, when in the Quran human life refers to both men and women, is it possible that we can achieve this balance with only one gender (either men or women alone)? Can you imagine maintaining this balance by ignoring half of humanity altogether? A basic reason for all the imbalances in human life is the consideration of half of humanity as a whole. This deprives us of the benefits of a balanced way of life, as in general it remains incomplete.

This ignorance goes a step further. The half (which man considers as being human), has been further divided and sub divided to such an extent, that the very self of ninety-nine percent of humans has been discriminated against. Only those who belong to the "upper strata", according to their self-made norms, are considered humans. This is irrespective of any bias towards intellectuals like Plato, or to any religious leader. Every where you see the division and distinction of classes is prevalent. (But this subject does not fall into the inquiry your have made, so I shall not talk about it in detail in this letter.)

## **The Principle of Division of Labour**

So Tahira, to maintain the balance mentioned above, what lines does the Quran draw? It urges you to think about and examine the universe; and the principle of the division of labour will be evident everywhere. The sun gives heat. Water is cool and provides moisture. Air has different qualities, and the provisions of earth are quite different. However, a seed is nourished by all these forces put together. All these forces work according to their own share in it. This division of labour does not recognize the superiority of one element over the other. Fire is in no way superior to water, because it provides heat and does not cool like water; in the same way water is not superior because it cools and does not give us heat like fire. Water and fire have different qualities and they have a place in the order of things; they are needed to keep the balance in our Universe. The merging together of one element with the other, fulfils each other's deficiencies. The seed needs both warmth and coolness for its nourishment. Since sun's rays lacked the coolness, the water provided it. In the same way water was deficient in warmth, and the sun provided it. As such, their correct function in the order of things is to amalgamate, so that the deficiency of one element may be compensated for by the other. But it would be stupid of the sun to think that it is superior, and that it can do something that water cannot.

Human society, too, can emulate the system prevalent in the universe. The principle of division of labour can be adhered here, too. In the human world man and woman are the two main 'beings'. They have qualities, which both of them share, but then they do have other characteristics which they do not share. The law that prevails in the universe applies here, too. One person's shortcomings are compensated for by the company of the other. In this respect one sex could be better than the other. This means, if men are superior to women in one respect, women are superior to men in another respect (4:32). Thus if one sex thinks that he or she is better because the opposite sex does not have the qualities which he or she has, it is a faulty judgment. The correct perspective would be to accept that one has a drawback which only the company of the opposite sex can complement; therefore, to complete oneself one might seek the other's company. Hence one is no better than the other sex; rather one needs the other's company's to complete oneself. Consequently the Quran has made this the basis of relationship between men and women when it says: We endowed you with "Moaddah" and "Rahmat" (30:21).

Both these words require pondering upon. "Moaddah" ordinarily means love and attraction, but 'wadun' is that nail which connects two things that mutually strengthen each other. That is why a complete display of the qualities of a thing is called 'Madam'. At another place in the Quran, this kind of complete merging of a man and woman has been referred to as a "dress". The Quran says: You are

for each-other like a dress is for a body (2:187).

The other word is Rahmat, which means provisions for nourishment. Nourishment and security of the kind you get in a mother's uterus. Therefore, We endowed you with 'Moaddah' and 'Rahmat' (30:21), would mean that mutual companionship of men and women nourishes and balances each other's capabilities. Hence if a man thinks he is superior to a woman, it is just his self inflated ego; it does not carry any weight in the scale of universal law.

## Woman's Individual Qualities

As I have mentioned above, men and women have many qualities which are common to both of them, for example intellect and insight. Those aspects of life in which both have common qualities would work side by side. By virtue of the division of labour, mentioned before, a woman has been biologically endowed with the capability of giving birth and raising a child. This a man lacks. This female capability fulfils a basic need of the society, and thus compensates for man's great drawback. In this respect a woman is far superior to a man. A mother's lap is the first training ground of a child. The child would be what his mother makes him; and the entire nation would be influenced by this upbringing. That is why in the Arabic language (and in the Quran itself) the nation is named as 'Ummah'. The root of this word is 'Um', which means mother. Therefore, according to the Quran, a mother is responsible for building and moulding a nation. This is the one quality of woman, which man is deprived of. Just think of how colossal a burden of responsibility a woman carries, and how exalted her status is! A woman spends most of her life dealing with these responsibilities, and during that time she may be unable to participate in those activities which require effort and hard physical work. This role in society is fulfilled by man. He spends and uses all his time to exploit and develop the sources of nourishment. (This is what is known as earning the daily bread). It is, however, obvious that this cannot give man an upper hand over a woman. A woman supplements one of his deficiencies and he covers for one of hers. In other words the woman is productive or procures in one way, and man in another. One is superior in one aspect, the other is superior in another. God has made you superior to one another (due to having different qualities) (2:34).

The Quran reveals that it is because of your self-made standards that you believe that since man earns and spends his earnings on the woman, he is better being. (If one accepts the principle that the earners are better than the spenders, then the farmers should be considered better than the thinkers, philosophers and inventors; and the soldiers fighting in a war should be much lower than the labourers, because thinkers, philosophers and soldiers do not till the land and produce food). You have stretched this self-made criterion to such an extent, that a woman has started questioning as to why she was made a female, and not a man. The society that the Quran envisages can never raise such questions in a woman's mind. That is why God has said:

On the basis of whatever qualities you have been endowed with by God, you cannot discriminate against the other sex in such a manner, that the other one yearns for the same (4:32).

Men and women have different qualities depending upon their individual fields of work. The question remains whether both do their duties in the most conscientious and dedicated manner.

Those who work diligently and wholeheartedly in their respective sphere of activities will reap the benefits in the society. You should only wish for being able to do your best in your respective fields (4:32).

## Common Capabilities

Aside from this division of labour, the remaining human capabilities belong to both men and women. Surah Al-Ahzab mentions all these capabilities, which can be attributed to both men and women:

If men have the potentiality to develop their personality by harmonizing themselves with the Laws of Allah, then women also have a similar potentiality; if men can be members of a movement that aims at world peace according to the inviolable Laws of Allah, then women also can participate in it by becoming its members; if men can restrain their capabilities so as to develop them within the laws of Allah, so can women; if men can vindicate the truth of their conviction through its practical implementation in life, so can women vindicate it; if men can remain steadfast on the path they have chosen, so can women; if men have the inexhaustible capacity to be more and more in harmony with the Laws of Allah once they are set on this path, so have women this inexhaustible capacity; if men can sacrifice lower values for higher values, so can women; if men can exercise control and do not violate the limitations set on them, so can women; if men can keep their sexual urge within the desired limits, so can women; if men can understand the Laws of Allah and focus their activities in life on them, so can women. Now if both men and women have equal capacities and potentialities, their results should also be the same for both of them. Hence both will enjoy protection and security, and all other such benefits and joy that will come out of their deeds (33:35).

Tahira, look at all these Quranic details and think! Is there any aspect of life for which it has said that man has a particular quality which the woman does not; that man can do this and a woman cannot; or that man can become this, and a woman cannot? That is why the Quran tells us, in clear terms:

The positive actions of both men and women would bring them satisfying results; both would experience heaven side by side; it will be the heaven of their home, of this world and in continuity of this life, the heaven of the hereafter (4:124). Nobody's toils would be wasted. (3:195).

You have seen Tahira, that according to the Quran:

(i) Both men and women have been endowed with all the human qualities. The objective of life is to develop all these qualities, and to use them most appropriately. Therefore on this account, there is no distinction between men or women. Both are entitled to 'enter paradise'. As such, there is no reason why one sex should be distinguished from the other.

(ii) However, due to the universal law of division of labour, there are certain duties that only a woman can fulfil. In this respect a woman compensates for one of man's great deficiency in society. But as a woman has to spend a great deal of her life fulfilling the call of these duties, she cannot earn her living. A man is thus called upon to fulfil this deficiency of the society. However, just as a woman cannot have an upper hand because she is fulfilling those duties which are impossible for a man to perform, in the same manner a man, too, cannot subjugate a woman by claiming that throughout most of her life she is incapable of earning her living.

(iii) Society's balance can be maintained only if all people perform their respective duties to the best of their abilities.

(iv) In this respect the life gets divided into two spheres. One encircles the duties of a woman only, and the other encompasses duties in which both men and women can participate together.

(v) Just as it would be wrong for a woman not to perform the duties exclusively assigned to her, in the same manner it would also be wrong to confine to her particular circle and to prohibit her from entering the mutual enclosure. Both such actions can cause the disruption of the society.

## **Men Rule the Women**

After these Quranic explanations, let us now examine the verse that is causing you so much worry.

This verse has been translated like this:

Men are rulers of women and because some spend on others from their earnings, they have been given supremacy over others. Therefore, good women are obedient and guard themselves against the unknown, even when nobody is looking. As for those women whom you are afraid would be disobedient, you should advise them, confine them to their rooms and beat them. If they listen to you and obey then spare them. Surely God is great (4:34). **(From the translation of Shah Rafiudin)**

Your anxiety is understandable because you have been reading the more common translations that arrive at the same conclusions which you have reached. These are the translations which men use to justify their use of the 'stick'. They present this verse as the 'Divine certificate or sanction'. This translation tells you that because they earn and spend on women, men are the rulers. A woman is thus duty-bound to be obedient to man; and if she is not, then he can beat her.

This is the position of women according to the common translations. Before I explain the correct meaning of this verse, I want you to understand an important point. When I say that our traditional translations do not give a correct understanding of the Quran, an objection is raised that as those learned translators were seasoned scholars of Arabic, how is it possible that they could not translate correctly? To day, we have Muslim countries whose mother tongue is Arabic, and if they, too, have not understood the correct meanings of the Quran, then who else would?

## Why Translations are Incorrect

These objections carry weight. To refute this objection it is, therefore, absolutely necessary to know the facts. The scholars who translated the Quran were faced with the task of fixing the meaning of a certain word in the Quran, and in any case they had to turn to language experts. We had hundreds of Quranic explanations written in Arabic during the third Hijra century. Some of these translators are even considered to be authorities on Arabic literature. Take, for example "Tafseer Jalalain", in which equivalents of the Quranic words have been used. Our translators considered these commentaries as the main basis for the translations. In the same manner Arabs, too, consider these commentaries as basic criteria. That is, whatever has been written in these Arabic commentaries is considered as the correct meaning of the Quran. This would therefore tell you that whatever meanings have been expounded in our translations, or else whatever understanding Arabic speaking people have ascribed it is in effect that comprehension of the Quran which our predecessors have written about in their commentaries. For instance, let us examine a relevant verse (4:34). In this verse "Qawwamun" has been translated as Ruler. Our ancestors consulted the Arabic commentaries to understand the meaning of "Qawwamun." In "Kashaaf" its meaning has been written as "Musaitarin" which means "*supervisors*" and "Jalalain" had the equivalent word "Mutasalleteen" which means the one who imposes one's will on others. It is obvious that when our translators noticed that these scholars of literature and their commentaries have ascribed such meanings, they, too, translated it as "Ruler". This is the correct translation of the words which are the equivalent of "Qawwamun" as used in these books; but not of the Quranic word "Qawwamun". As such, we should try to understand how this faulty comprehension crept into these commentaries.

As I have mentioned before, these commentaries were written at a time when society was oppressed by kingship and our Sharia (Laws) had come under the influence of mysticism, Zoroastrians, Jews and the Christians. Tabari's commentary was the earliest, and the others are in fact a continuation of the same. Tabari fixes the meaning of the Quran according to the previous commentators. In quite a few of my articles I have mentioned how these commentaries came into being, and how they were arranged and collected. The history of commentaries reveals that it was quite easy to coin a meaning. All these commentaries are a reflection of that society and period in which they were minted - which is certainly not the glorious time of the Messenger of God (PBUH). It is thus obvious that the comprehension of the Quran as fixed by these interpretations would be prejudiced. To understand this

fact, let us once again examine again the verse we have been looking at above.

## Traditions

We have seen that "Kashaaf" and others have understood "Qawwamun" as supervisors and imposers, and justified the beating of women from this verse. Our books mention the circumstances which led to the revelation of this verse. They tell us that a woman complained to the Nabi (PBUH) about her husband who had slapped her, who in turn advised her to take revenge; but when this verse was revealed he had to take his decision back. Another account tells us that the Nabi (PBUH) forbade the beating of women and that upon hearing this Omer® came and told him that after hearing this order, women had become bold towards their husbands. Thereupon the Nabi (PBUH) again allowed husbands to beat their wives. Following this, when menfolk resorted to the beatings then the women came back to him with many complaints. Once again, on hearing these complaints he told men that he disapproved of the beating of women; but when he wanted to allow the taking of revenge, then this verse was revealed. Therefore, the standing order remained that since men rule over them, they can beat the women. We are told by Ashath ® that once he was visiting Omer ®, when the latter happened to have an argument with his wife. Omer ® struck her, and then said, "Look, Ashath ®, remember three things that I heard the Nabi (PBUH) say: Firstly, a man should never be asked the reason for beating his wife; second, always say your "*witar*" (a prayer offered at night) prayers before you go off to sleep; and the third, I have forgotten."

It is not only that the men have been made rulers over you. There is yet another story attributed to the Nabi (PBUH) in which he is reported to have said that, "If ever I could order anyone to bow before somebody other than God, then I would order a woman to prostrate before her husband." To explain this there are more sayings, but these are not the sort of things that a father could write to her daughter.

These are the historical accounts, which have been written in our oldest books of commentaries, to explain the verse we are looking at. Owing to these commentaries, the "Qawwamun" have been considered as imposers and supervisors; and the same has been translated as 'rulers' by our translators. Accordingly, our laws of jurisprudence were formulated; and as such, Hasas in "Ahkam ul Quran" has attributed all the religious laws pertaining to the beating and confining of women, to these traditions and commentaries.

## Another Hurdle

These traditions created another big hurdle. If the early scholars had attributed the meanings of the Quranic verses to themselves, then the later experts could have differed from them, but because the former attributed the meanings to the Messenger of God (PBUH), then their referred explanations became quoted as having been said by the Messenger of God (PBUH). Accordingly, out of reverence, nobody could dare disagree to them. Hence if ever anybody disagreed with these meanings, the immediate rejoinder was, "do you understand the Quran better, or is it the Messenger of God (PBUH) who knows more"? Now, which Muslim worth his salt could ever claim to know the Quran better than the Messenger of God (PBUH)? In this way the explanations in these commentaries gained the status of basic laws for all times to come. It is, however, very clear that these faulty interpretations were never rendered by the Nabi (PBUH); rather these emanated from those traditions which were practiced several hundred years after the death of the Nabi (PBUH). If the meanings had been got confirmed by the Messenger of God (PBUH), then he would either have got an authentic book written along with the Quran, or he would have written it himself and given it to the people. But the Messenger of God (PBUH) did not give any such book to the people (Ummah), and therefore, the meanings expressed in the books referred to above do not belong to him. The later comprehension belongs to our commentators and was fixed during the period mentioned above, but to give authenticity the practices cited are being attributed to Nabi (PBUH).

By now, Tahira, you must have understood how, "Qawwamun" in (4:34), was translated as 'imposers', 'supervisors' and 'rulers'. It would be of some advantage if I mention here a delicate point. It appears that somebody realized that some non-Muslims may object to the permission being given by the Messenger of God (PBUH) to maltreat women. Now see how they have tried to evade this objection. One account relates that when a woman accosted the Messenger of God (PBUH) and complained against her husband, she was allowed to take revenge. Then this verse was revealed, and the Messenger of God (PBUH) remarked, "We wanted something else but God ordered contrary to it". Tahira, do you understand what happened? The commentators tried to show that the Messenger of God (PBUH) wanted justice for women, but because God ordered something contrary to it, the Messenger of God (PBUH) was rendered helpless. Therefore, he had to concede and educate the people accordingly.

The inventors of this explanation saved the Messenger of God (PBUH) from this objection, but made the blame go automatically towards God. The severity of the objection increases when you think that even the Messenger of God (PBUH) felt the harshness of the Divine order. So much so, that he remarked, "We wanted something else, but God ordered contrary to it". It is very clear that this account has been conjured up later. The Messenger of God (PBUH) always kept his will in line with the Divine laws; and he always wished it so. He would never say that he wanted something else, and that God gave him something quite the opposite. Those people who say that throughout his life the Messenger of God (PBUH) taught what was revealed to him, should ponder as to why the Messenger of God (PBUH) would desire one thing, when God ordered otherwise.

### Correct Comprehension of the Verse

Tahira, I realize that you are impatient to learn the Quranic sense of that verse. But unless you know the background to the prevalent explanation, you will not understand the real meaning. I deemed it necessary to go into these details, before coming to the actual and real meaning.

First of all, note that this verse is not talking about a husband and wife. "Ar-Rijal" men, and "An-Nisa" women, in general, are being talked about. Therefore, the discussion concerns the duties of men and women in a society.

You have seen that the women, owing to their particular duties are unable to earn their living; and on the other hand, men have all the time to devote to this. Therefore, the Quran enjoins that according to the principle of division of labour men are the providers of the living. This makes the meaning of this verse quite clear that in society it is the duty of men to earn the living. This is because the principle of the division of labour tells us that men have more of one kind of capability, and women have been endowed with more of another kind. Since men can devote all their time to earning a living and the women are at times unable to do so; then the income of men should fulfil the needs of women. This arrangement would provide women with the necessities of life, and their capabilities would flourish. Women would thus be free to use their abilities for the goals assigned to them. This is the meaning of "Qanetat". "Siquan Qanitun" means a canteen (a water canister made of leather) which is used for transporting water. After it is filled, the opening can be securely closed so that water would not spill on the way; but it would be available for when and where needed. If women have to earn their own living, then they cannot use their abilities that they have been particularly endowed with to fulfil certain functions. These abilities would thus be misplaced and wasted. This point has been further clarified by saying: *the law of God provided them with their livelihood, so that they would be free to peacefully nurture what has been assigned to them, confidentially, that is, the care of the foetus* (4:34).

Here Tahira, two things require serious thinking. Firstly, the Quran mentions these particular duties and commitments of women in such a decent manner and pointers, that even a father can talk to his daughter without any reservations. Secondly, our traditional translations and prevalent commentaries profess as follows: Men are rulers and supervisors over women because they spend their earnings on

them; and in turn good wives are obedient and keep themselves chaste in the absence of men. This implies that it is the business of men to rule women; and it is enjoined upon women to obey men and remain chaste. It is, therefore, claimed that only women should be virtuous, obedient and chaste. However, in Surah Al-Ahzab, and in all the verses that have been mentioned before, the Quran enjoins that both men and women are required to have all these qualities. If it is necessary for a woman to be obedient, then according to the Quran, it is just as important for a man to be obedient. Therefore, the principle that only men are to rule and earn, and women to obey, is totally wrong. The relationship of men and women is that of mutual companionship. A mutual companionship completely negates the idea of one ruling and the other obeying. Both are, Zauj (companions) of each other, and both adhere to divine laws.

## **The Beating of Women**

Let us proceed and examine the rest of the verse.

Since the commentaries have decided that men are to rule over the women, and that women are to obey men, then the rest of the verse in endorsing the first part was understood as: *If a wife disobeys, then first she should be persuaded, thereafter, the mutual relationship should be discontinued, and if all these recourses are ineffective, then she should be beaten (4:34).*

As written before, the reference here is not to husband and wife. We are talking about the duties of ordinary men and women. As said earlier, according to the principle of division of labour, men are required to earn and women, being free from such worries should, therefore, shoulder their own responsibilities to the best of their abilities. It is further stated that if women, despite this exemption, defy the principle of division of labour without any reason, as seen in some European countries, then it is necessary for society to halt this practice. If to copy men, they neglect their duties without any justification, then the human race could vanish. That is why it has been said that first, society should persuade them and explain that this trait of theirs would spell disaster. If, after this, they still do not listen, then they should be confined to the four walls of their homes. This would be like internment. If, however, they are still defiant, then they would qualify for corporal punishment, authorized by a proper court of law.

My dear daughter, this is the correct comprehension and sense of this verse. Our legacy, however, has been telling us that as men are the rulers and supervisors of women, they have a right to enslave their wives. Since the wife uses her husband's earnings, it is her duty to obey him, and if she does not, then he has the right to use his stick and coerce her into obedience.

Tahira, this letter has become quite long and there are still many of your questions, which require replies. Anyway I shall definitely be writing to you again and the forthcoming letters will contain the answers to every query of yours. But please do not hurry me. You know that I have so many other things to do.

Peace be with you!

**Parwez**  
**May 12,1953**

## **Appendix to the letter above**

Certain queries regarding the following two points, were received after the letter above was published:

(i) Why is the inheritance of a girl half that of the boy?

(ii) Why are two women 'equal' to a man when giving evidence?

Both these topics were in my mind, and as I had written at the end of the letter, I was thinking of clarifying these and other related topics in subsequent letters. However judging from the number of letters I have received, readers are anxious about these two topics. Therefore, I have felt it appropriate that I should explain them sooner.

## **Girl's Share in Inheritance**

Regarding inheritance, the Quran tells us that the share of one boy is equal to that of two girls (4:11). As I have mentioned in my previous letter, the Quran establishes a society in which men are the main earners, because the duties and responsibilities assigned to the women do not leave them with enough time to earn their own living. It is thus obvious that in a society in which the man is responsible for earning livelihood, he should get a larger portion when making an economic division. That is why, in inheritance, a boy's share has been kept double that of a girl. Girls have not been made responsible for their own, or their family's expenses. On the contrary, a boy has to bear his own expenses in addition to those expenses of his wife and children. As such, he should be getting the greater share.

On the other hand, in a situation in which men are neglecting their duties and it is feared that the girls would be rendered destitute, then the Quran gives authority that, in a will, a person can divide his property as he pleases and according to the circumstances. The division of inheritance as given in the Quran is only applicable if a person dies without executing a will, or if his will does not include all his property. The Quran is quite clear about this.

As you can see, the fixing of a lesser share for a girl neither lessens her rights nor degrades her status in the society, when compared to that of a man.

## **Women's Evidence**

The second point is about evidence. Surah Al-Baqarah enjoins upon us that whenever you deal in loans, you should state it in writing and have two men to witness it. Further on it says: If you do not have two men, then make a man and two women as witnesses. The Quran itself explains why should there be two women. It is commonly understood that the verse means: if one of them forgets, then the other one reminds her (2:282). But the Quran has used the word "Tadilla" which is quite different from forgetting. Basically it means to get confused or become perplexed. Given this explanation for the word, let us come to the actual verse. This verse raises these questions:

(i) Why does it necessitate two women in place of one man?

(ii) Why has it been said, particularly about women, that if one is perplexed then the other would remind her?

From this it is commonly concluded that the Quran feels the women are less trustworthy and that their mental capability is less than that of men.

For trustworthiness, the Quran enjoins the condition of two even for men. Would you conclude this that the Quran does not also trust men? Was it for this that one man was not considered enough! Was another one considered necessary for evidence? It is obvious that the Quran does not mistrust one man. The only purpose, according to the Quran of having two men as witnesses is that if there is anything lacking in the statement of one, then the testimony of the other one would complement it. This is only to forestall any legal omission. The purpose is not to brand men untrustworthy. The purpose is to have absolutely reliable evidence, without any omissions. In the same way when the Quran makes it necessary for two women in place of one man, it is not telling us that women are any less trustworthy than men. Here, too, the aim is to have the most reliable evidence. Otherwise, as far as the comparative trust among men and women is concerned, the Quran gives both an equal status.

For example where evidence in law has been mentioned, the testimony of one woman is just as acceptable as that of one man.

Now we are left with the second question as to why did the Quran specifically remark about women, that if one of them is confused or perplexed then the other should remind her?

Clearly according to the division of labour (which, as I have mentioned in my letter, refers to the duty of women towards bringing up and nurturing children and of men to earn the family's livelihood), some differences between biological constitution of men and women were necessary.

## **Psychological differences Between Men and Women**

This difference is quite natural. Since physical characteristics do influence a person's psyche, men and women necessarily have psychological differences. In this respect, one resulting effect, which is quite clear is that, a man, after bringing income, is satisfied that he has done his duty towards bringing up his children. The woman, on other hand, is never satisfied that she has done enough, even after sacrificing all she has on her children. She wants to put in even the last reserve of her energy into caring for her child. If it were possible, she would physically keep her child in her heart. The hugging of the child to her bosom is the subconscious manifestation of this emotion. You have noticed that every woman in this world carries her child on her left arm. Why? It is because she wants to keep her child close to her heart, which is on the left side. What are the consequences of these psychological or biological differences between men and women? Many western scholars of psychology have done, and are doing research on this subject. Dr. M. Esther Harding has written an interesting book on this subject, called "The Way of All Women". In it he has written about the point we are considering:

If the men are asked to work where problems of human relationship are involved, they do not find it palatable, but the women on the other hand love such jobs. The women find it difficult, where they are required to define details of a problem with absolute accuracy. (Page 301).

Why does this happen? Nothing conclusively could be said about it, but Dr. Harding states that this is an ability which he has found generally common among the women he has tested in many practical examples.

If this research is correct, then you can appreciate how much the Quran has taken care of this issue. In the courts, the details of a case are normally argued, commented, discussed and questioned in a very critical manner. If the details of the case are not presented absolutely accurately, then this also affects the evidence in the case. To corroborate evidence, it is necessary that even the minutest differences are defined correctly. Women might have that psychological deficiency which has been mentioned above, and moreover by being busy with their particular duties, they may not have enough opportunities, as compared to men, to participate in such activities or problems. As a result, matters of dispute such as court cases where serious matters are discussed, a woman in general would not be able to explain the details correctly. The Quran has described the same phenomenon at a different place and in another manner. Surah Al-Zukhruf states that the Arabs used to believe that God had daughters. They used to say that their angels and deities were God's daughters. The Quran replied, (let alone the belief of God having children is absolutely ridiculous). Look at the dilemma, that even for off-springs they allocate sons to themselves and girls are attributed to God. They devalue a girl so much, that if a man hears the 'good news' of the birth of a daughter, he becomes sad and then says that it is God's child.

Those who have been brought up with a silver spoon and in jewels, in matters of dispute they are not very clear about their mind. (43:18).

To become perplexed in disputed matters, specially court cases, is the same that has been mentioned

in Surah Al-Baqarah by the word "Tadhhal" (mental confusion) By now you must have understood that two women in place of one man does not mean that women cannot be trusted, or that they are less brainy, or that they are given any privilege to rule women.

According to Dr. Harding's research, if women fall behind in issues concerning accurate details, the men are lacking in matters of public relationship. If one is deficient in one aspect, the other is deficient in another. Mutual cooperation can fulfil all the deficiencies in a society.

It should be made quite clear that the Quran talks in general terms and does not discuss the exceptions. It is not meant that proper education and training cannot make up for the deficiency in a person. The heavenly or ideal society professes that: a woman will have a flair for oratory and languages (56:37). Further to these explanations, it is to be noted that in respect of the two women, the Quran does not say that both of them are to give evidence one after the other, thereby making their testimony equal to that of one man. It says: if the one who is presenting evidence is uncertain due to some confusion, then the one standing by her should remind her (2:282). This makes it obvious that if the woman recording the evidence is not confused then any prompting by the other would not occur, and the testimony of a lone woman would be enough.

It is also evident that if girls are not adorned by jewels only that they would not be at a loss when problems in life are to be tackled; but when they are adorned with the jewels of education and proper training, they would be quite eloquent. In this case no standby woman would be needed for evidence. The Quran's laws in such matters are specifically conditional. When these conditions are not fulfilled, the laws do not remain operative. For example, if you do find water, then the law of dry ablutions becomes spurious.

This is all regarding this matter, as I have been able to understand from the Quran. As I have already mentioned in my letter, the different aspects of the relation between men and women\*, and their position in the society, are in front of me, and you will see them gradually in my forthcoming letters.

**Parwez.**

\* In respect of divorce, the Quran says men have a slight privilege over women, I shall refer to this at a relevant place.

## [Home](#) **Status of Men and Women**

### *Second Letter to Tahira*

*This letter contains more explanation of more or less the same problems that have been mentioned in the first letter. The aim is to further emphasize the basic points.*

My daughter, you worry over such trivialities as to why only men have been addressed in the Quran and not women? I shall answer this question later, but I hope you will not mind it if I say something first. These anxieties manifest the inferiority complex of a woman, that her status is less than that of a man. I am surprised that you, being a student of the Quran, have been unable to expel such a non-Quranic idea from your mind. I know that centuries-old traditional beliefs do get set in people's minds and are very difficult to erase. Did you notice Ayesha's father? He was a third generation Muslim, but whenever he sneezed, involuntarily he would say "Jay Nandi". Our late uncle checked him many times (and he, Ayesha's father knew it, too,) that you say "Al-Hamdolillah" (Praise be to God), but he still said "Jay Nandi" whenever he sneezed. When "Jay Nandi" is in your blood, then it is difficult to expel it.

### **Sub-conscious Ideas**

How many of such beliefs are hidden in our subconscious? The Quran tells us about the children of Israel that the love of the calf had gone down to their subconscious (2:93). This is what is meant by it. However, Quran claims that (it) treats the maladies of the hearts, too, (2:57) (not referring to heart palpitation, but to the disorders of the heart or mind. However, and to speak the truth, heart palpitation is also in a way caused by the disorders of the mind. Many western researchers have concluded that innumerable physical ailments are caused by psychological disorders, and that correct treatment is through psychological correction), therefore according to the Quran it is essential that faulty ideas be erased off one's mind.

Now let us turn to your question. You know that the Quran is meant for the whole of humanity. It addresses human beings first. It has come to enlighten the "human race". Tell me do "human beings" or "human race" mean men only, or does it include both men and women? Is 'mankind' limited to men only, or does it include women, too?

### **Masculine Gender**

The fact is that whenever the Quran has addressed Momineen (the Believers) as a whole, the masculine gender has always been used. It is the general rule of usage of a language that wherever a mixed gathering is addressed, then at the beginning one addresses as "Ladies and Gentlemen", but after this only the masculine gender is used in the next of the speech. One keeps on speaking spontaneously in masculine gender, but the speech is meant for both men and women. You have never protested that it is an insult that you have been invited to this gathering, but the speaker has talked to men only. The reason is that you accept that although the speaker has used the masculine gender only, it was inclusive of both men and women; that it is a rule of the usage of language that in a mixed gathering, the masculine gender should be used. The Quran has just followed this style. That is, wherever it has addressed "the Believers" as a whole, it has used masculine gender but both men and women are being referred to. To highlight the fact that men and women are both included in the group of believers, the Quran has mentioned their qualities as separate classes as well. As I have written in my first letter, see Surah Al-Ahzab (33:35) about how men and women amongst the believers walk side by side, Muslim men and women etc. Both these genders are used till the end of the verse.

Tell me Tahira, would you still complain that Quran has not addressed women along with men?

Your second question reminds me of a joke. A man had to reach somewhere on the day for his marriage. Unfortunately, he missed the train, and there was no way that he could reach that place on the same day. He was very perplexed. In this absent-minded state, he went to the telegraph office and at once sent a telegram to his would be wife saying, "Do not marry till I come".

You say, it is written in the Quran that men would get good women in heaven; but that it has not been told whether women would also get good men or not. Just think Tahira, if men would get women, does that not mean that women would be getting men, too? For instance, if Hamid gets Ayesha as his wife, would not Ayesha be getting Hamid as her husband, too? When a husband gets a wife, then the wife gets a husband, too.

As for heaven, Tahira, you must understand a fundamental truth because without its cognizance many things remain confused.

## **Cognizance of Heaven**

The Quran mentions a heaven that one would enter in the life after death. It has been explicitly stated that with the present level of your mind's perception, you cannot comprehend its dimensions. No one knows what pleasures await one, as a reward of one's good deeds (32:17). This heaven is not enclosed in the four walls of space. It encompasses the earth and the whole of the universe (3:133). Therefore, what life would be like in that heaven is beyond our comprehension. But there is another heaven; one which we create here on earth by establishing the Divinely ordained system. This implies the ideal society we constitute along Quranic lines, is heavenly. The details of this heaven concern this world. Not only can we understand it, but we can also create it and live in it. This is that heaven which the Quran mentions "men along with women", and that is how it should be. Could there possibly be a society made by men alone, without women? What would be the qualities of the women in an ideal society? The answer is the same qualities that women believers (Mominat) would have.

## **Women of an Ideal Society**

Women believer have been asked to be modest when they go out; to be with downcast eyes (Men have been asked the same). They should not invite unbridled gazes by being immodest. In the ideal society the Quran calls them those with modest downcast gazes (55:56). The Quran tells us that believing women keep their honour above everything (Men have been asked the same). In the heavenly society, it is said about them: No man, whether known to them or not, has even touched them before their husbands (55:56). As such, every young man who wants to marry would be quite sure of his fiancée's purity. What a mental satisfaction a prospective spouse would have, who himself would be righteous, too. These wives are called refined and of high status by the Quran (56:34). The Quran relates that during the era before Islam, the women used to be quite emotional and hence could not present their cases properly in disputed matters (43:18). But the Quranic society transformed the same woman, with proper education and training, into altogether a new being (56:35-36). She would become eloquent. (This does not mean that her emotions would be eliminated. A woman is comparatively more emotional than a man and she should remain so, since her natural duties bring her emotions into play. Proper training channellises these emotions on to the right track, rather than them being wrongly used). They would be able to communicate and be healthy and energetic (56:37). What a boon it would be for those whose houses such women would grace! (56:38) Such righteous women of superior intellect would grace the homes of men having similar qualities. After the formation of this society, the principle of family life would be, bad women for bad men and unwholesome men for unwholesome women. Righteous women for righteous men and good men for good women (24:26). This makes home-life heavenly and an ideal society starts with such homes.

Tahira, the Quran describes this fact in a unique manner. According to it, a difference of outlook,

ideas and images, beliefs, principles and way of life between a man and woman creates hell; and on the contrary homogeneity in all these aspects makes for a harmonious home. The Quran cited the difference between Momin (a believer in God only) and a Mushrik (sharing with others, God's domain of absolute rule) as an example; because belief in the Unity of God and belief in the Multiplicity of it, is the biggest difference.

## Heaven in a Home

The Quran directs that no Momin man should ever marry a Mushrik woman and neither should a Momin woman marry a Mushrik man. It also says that those admitting to such married relationships are dragging you to hell. In contrast God invites you to heaven with a harmonious marriage where partners think alike (2:221). A heaven within a home, and protection from all kinds of external mischief. Tahira, this is the position of a man and a woman in a heavenly society. Now tell me where your objection stands when you say that the Quran gives "Hoor" to men in heaven, but has not done anything for women? By the way I should tell you that in Arabic, "Hoor-e-Ein" means having a pure and clean intellect, and this word is used both for men and women. Therefore, the heavenly couples would be exemplary specimens of the ideal mixture of thought and deed. Imagine my dear daughter, how satisfying and blissful that society would be when its men and women would have such qualities (13:29). Also remember that, in Arabic, Zauj (Plural Azwaj) just does not mean a wife, it means a companion. According to these meanings, a wife is a companion to her husband and a husband is a companion to his wife. So wherever the Quran mentions "Azwaj-e-Mutaharat" it always refers not just to righteous wives, but to righteous companions.

## Christianity and Woman

Although no religion (in the form that these are with now) in the world has given a woman her due status, Christianity has gone to an extreme in this respect. They created this belief that Adam's wife was the cause of his expulsion from Heaven. She was tempted by Satan and then she in turn tempted Adam. Thus after this, the religion nurtured hatred against woman. Moreover, Christ's celibate life made Christian's dislike women all the more. When Christianity corroborated monastic life, celibacy was considered essential for spiritual progress. It was due to these beliefs that a woman was considered the originator of all evil. This is the reason Christian clergy objects to seeing women in Quran's Heaven. Firstly, the Quran rejected the idea that Adam's wife God him expelled from Heaven. The Quran tells us the both Adam and his wife, committed a mistake (2:36). Later their atonement was accepted (2:37). I do not need to write separately about the story of Adam and Eve, as you must have read about it in my book "Iblees-o-Adam" (Satan and Adam). That is not the story of a particular couple, but in it the qualities of men and women have been allegorically described. In this respect you must consider one more thing. We bitterly criticize the Hindu belief that whoever is born in a Brahmin's (Priestly class) house, commands respect by everybody and whoever is born in a Shudar (serving class) family, has to serve others all his life. We tell them that it is not the child's choice where he is born. When you do not have a choice in this respect then it is utterly foolish to declare somebody worthy of respect or otherwise. It is quite true that the Quran completely rejected this idea and asserted that all children are equal by birth, and are equally worthy of respect (17:70).

If we accept the superiority of a boy over a girl, just because of his sex, is it not the same Hindu philosophy which we otherwise reject? Just ponder, is it a girl's fault that she is born a girl and not a boy? But whether it is her fault or not, we keep on punishing her all her life. Is this Islam?

I have not yet fully recovered, so I am unable to write to you in detail. I hope that in these brief thoughts, you will find satisfying answers to your questions. Remember me to Saleem. I have yet to answer his letter.

Peace be with you!

**Parwez**  
**October, 1955**

## [Home](#) **MARRIAGE - DIVORCE - POLYGAMY**

### *Third Letter to Tahira*

No Tahira, there is a whole lot of difference between a child and the young one of an animal. The young one of an animal is born with instincts which training cannot change. If before it opens its eyes, a pup is made to suckle a goat, it would not be affected in any way. It will remain a dog, and grow up to be a dog. It will have all the dog-traits and none of the goat. Its instincts would neither be affected by the goat's milk, nor by having been brought up with goats kids. Why go far, didn't you observe the results when your hen was hatching her own and the duck's eggs together? The eggs produced chicks and ducklings, and all were cared for under the wings of the hen. But when they faced water for the first time, the ducklings went straight in the water and the hen and chicks remained out. The hen's worry was worth watching, but the ducklings were quite unaware of the fact that they had done something to be worried about. On the contrary the chicks did not go near the water. Being brought up with, and in the company of chicks had no effect on them, and neither would it be so in the future. Ducklings remain ducklings

In contrast, if an uncouth or rural woman's child is sent to a civilized and learned family, and the child from a refined family is given to a village woman, you will see that peasant's child would become a refined and civilized person, while the other child would be uncouth and become a peasant. There is no doubt there are hereditary influences, but education, training and environmental influences can overcome these. Also, what we call 'hereditary influences' are actually influences of society which are being transferred accumulatively, generation to generation. The effects of education and training can be seen to the extent that if a child of Shia parents is raised by Sunnis, then he will have Sunni ideas. Similarly, if a Hindu child is given to a Muslim family, he will become a Muslim. No dogmatic discussion is needed for such a phenomenon; these are everyday observations which reveal that a human child is not born ready-made (like an animal offspring), but that it becomes what his or her primary environment or education trains it for. If a nation wants its next generation to have human qualities, then it is necessary for that nation to create such an environment. A child's environment is the home where he is born and grown up; as such, his first training ground is his mother's lap.

### **Mother's Lap**

In this letter I really do not want to go into details, through which I would make you understand, with examples from the conclusions of psycho analysts that for whatever a child will become in future, its main foundation is laid during the first two or three years of its life. Dr. Jung asserts that the foundations of a child's character are laid at a time when he has yet to learn to speak. At this age he is visually observing and absorbing the environment in which he is raised. Later the edifice of his life is erected on these foundations. Therefore, the making or marring of a child's life depends mostly upon his environment. And his environment depends upon his parent's mutual relationship. This is to say that the environment is created by how husbands and wives react to each other.

### **Mutual Relationship of Husband and Wife**

This is the reason why the Quran considers a congruent and happy relationship of a husband and wife as a pivot of family life. This not only makes the couple's life happy, but their children's, too. Growing up in a harmonious environment, makes them a blend to be prided by their nation, and the whole of humanity benefits from them. The Quran says that a husband and wife relationship can be happy only if their attitude and temperament are compatible, and if they have the same goals in life and their thinking is alike. Such men and women are congruent in head and heart, and create a balanced and happy environment in which their children grow up into sublime exponents of humanity. In Quran's diction, this is called Nikah. Nikah literally means to absorb each other in the

same way as rain drops are absorbed by earth. It is a kind of amalgamation, like that of sleep in the eyes. A couple executing this kind of contract is called Zauj. As mentioned in my previous letter, Zauj means 'complement', that is, the one has to be there to complete the other one. Husband complements a wife and a wife complements a husband. If one is ignored, then the other is rendered useless. If one wheel of a carriage is damaged the other one automatically becomes useless. Both the wheels are Zauj to each other.

## **Nikah**

It is a fact that the family contract (Nikah) in which both the parties are congruent head and heart-wise, ensures a heavenly environment. Incongruent parties coming together create hell. The Quran has explained this in quite an effective manner, and I have written about this point in my previous letter.

It is obvious that this kind of relationship, which is based on alike mental level with shared ideas and concepts, can only be possible between two consenting parties by mutual agreement. That is why the Quran calls it a 'contract' (4:21). The first condition for the contract is that both the parties should be mature.

## **Age of Nikah**

A minor's contract cannot be taken seriously. Therefore, Nikah of a minor is not a Nikah according to the Quran. The Quran associates Nikah with adulthood (4:6). The second condition of the contract is that it should be executed without coercion and should have the consent of both the parties. So, on the one hand men are addressed as follows in (4:3) to perform Nikah with those women whom you like, and on the other hand, about women, it says that it would be absolutely unlawful for you to own women forcibly (4:19).

Hence, Nikah is a contract in which an adult man and an adult woman willingly agree to become companions (husband and wife) to honour all the duties and privileges enjoined by the Quran. Living a life full of mutual love and shared ideas and interests. This way they will create a pleasant environment that would be conducive to our future generations in being humane and have balanced personalities. If even one point is missing or deficient, then the relationship does not become Nikah and deteriorates into a simple biological sex connection. The Quran itself explains the basic difference between the two kinds of relationships when in (4:24), explains the 'married' relationship. Quran's style is quite unique, when it explains something, by discussing the opposite. It says that married relationship means "Muhsineen" and not "Musafiheen" Here "Muhsineen" has been explained by "Musafiheen". The root word of "Musafiheen" is "Safha", which means pouring out. Further, "Hasana" means to keep oneself within certain limits. If the relationship of Nikah does not limit itself to the basic restrictions on which Nikah was established, then it is no longer Nikah. It degenerates to "Safha". Arabs used to draw lots by shooting arrows, one of which was blank. This blank arrow was called 'Asfeeh'. In other words, even if it hit the target, it was not counted as a result. This is not the place to mention the other meanings of this verse. (I hope you have understood the simile that the Quran has used).

## **Polygamy**

Let us move forward. When Nikah aims at a harmonious life, and sets to create an environment for the children which would be conducive to the blossoming of their personalities, then in the presence of one wife another wife cannot be justified. Such company could convert the home into a hell, instead of developing companionship and respect. A second wife can be justified only when the first wife has died, and one is quite certain that the second wife would have an equally harmonious atmosphere. Otherwise circumstance may evolve in which the marriage contract has to be dissolved. This is called 'divorce', which is an issue that will be discussed in detail later.

All of these, dear daughter Tahira, were the results of the above

In respect of divorce, the Quran says: If you want to bring another wife in place of your first wife... (4:20) This makes it very clear that a second wife can come in place of a first wife, and not in her presence.

As I write this I can imagine how perturbed you would be after reading this. Surely you would question how I could say such an eccentric thing, when Muslims have been assured of four wives? Let aside the past, even today there are many homes where a husband has more than one wife. These homes include some of the most respected families. Then how can one assert that the presence of one wife leaves no room for another one?

You are right Tahira, and so am I. You say that four wives at a time is the usual practice of Muslims, and I am saying that the Quran allows one wife at a time. Now you will ask how the practice of keeping two, three or four wives at a time became prevalent among Muslims? Well, listen.

The Quran mentions marrying more than one wife in one place only and that is the third verse of Surah An-Nisa. The second verse of this Surah is:

The property of orphaned children, if they have any, should be protected like you protect your own children's property. When they attain adulthood, the trusted property should be returned to them. Do not exchange their goods with yours of lesser quality. Misappropriating their possessions would be a great injustice (4:2).

This is Surah An-Nisa's second verse. The literal translation of the third verse is:

If you are afraid that you will be unable to do justice to the orphans, then you could take in Nikah two, three or four women whom you like (4:3).

## Basic Condition

One thing is quite clear from the above mentioned verse. Taking more than one wife is conditional; and the condition is if you are afraid that you may not be able to do justice to the orphans. The question is as to what does this condition stand for? Surah An-Nisa itself infers an explanation.

Early verses of this Surah contain laws about women, orphans, property and inheritance. Thereafter, laws pertaining to war are mentioned. Just imagine, a small cluster of Muslims had to fight many wars, within seven to eight years of migration. An obvious consequence was the diminishing number of men and the increasing number of orphans and widows.

Today, we normally use the word 'orphan' for those children whose parents are no more alive or who do not have their fathers. But in Arabic this word is used for such children, as well as for those women who have been left alone because they have been unable to get a husband. Therefore when this verse says, "If you are afraid you would not be able to do justice to the orphans," it is referring to fatherless children and such women who are without husbands, whether they are widows or are unmarried. To elaborate on the issue it may be noted that in early Madina life, owing to constant wars, and their consequence, such children and women far out-numbered men. Besides, the Muslim women from Makkah after leaving their non-Muslim husbands, sought refuge in Madina. Such circumstances had made the presence of these orphans and widows a serious social problem, which had to be solved satisfactorily. If it was a problem of everyday provisions then many solutions could have been considered. But the real problem was how to take care of the young widows and orphaned girls. Some extraordinary solutions had to be sought, specially because they could not be married to non-Muslims. Muslim women could neither marry the infidels of Quraish, nor Jews or Christians. These were those extraordinary conditions under which the above mentioned guidance was given. That is, if the problem of orphans could not be solved in a manner which adequately fulfilled their

rights and needs, then one solution was that one man should shoulder the responsibility of more than one woman. This was a way of saving society from all the drawbacks which would entail from having the young women and orphan children unattended. But at the same time men have been advised to make sure that this does not interfere with the balance and tranquillity of their home. If it was to be so, then it would not be permitted.

As such, the rest of the verse was revealed together with the above: If you are afraid that you will not be able to keep the balance, then maintain one wife only (4:3).

This is, my dear girl, the one verse in the whole of the Quran about polygamy and the above is its background. After this, could the way Muslims indulge in polygamy possibly be justified according to the Quran? Do you see any marriage being solemnized where the condition laid down by the Quran, if you are afraid that you will not be able to do justice to the orphans, then you can have more than one wife (4:3), is being observed or adhered to? Trying to justify polygamy under cover of this verse, in ordinary circumstances and without those conditions, is nothing but the open flouting of its injunctions. If you ask somebody, he would say, that as he was childless, he married again; as if God had enjoined upon him to increase the tribe of Adam and then come to Him, failing which he would be sent to hell. On the contrary, God Himself has said that children are born according to the law of nature. Some get boys and some girls; some have boys and girls both, and some remain childless (42:50).

Some say that because their wives were perpetually ill, they married again. According to them companionship means: As long as your partner is healthy you keep her, and the minute she is sick you throw her into hell.

But such excuses, no matter how weak, are forwarded by those who think that there should be some justification for human problems. Religious minded people do not think that any excuse is necessary. Their reply is quite clear. They say that when religion allows four wives, then what other excuse is needed beyond this for justification? Therefore this group behaves like this. Firstly, they marry four wives; after this they divorce one of them and then a new bride is brought to fill the quorum. In this way, they believe, they are accumulating the rewards of the hereafter, because they are obeying the laws about Nikah and divorce, and are maintaining the limit of four wives, too. For such people, the Quran has said:

These people want to deceive the law of God and those who adhere to it, but they do not understand that they are deceiving themselves. (2:9).

Anyway, do understand this fact again that in the Quran there is only one verse where permission has been granted for marrying more than one wife. As I have mentioned above, this came as an emergency measure to tackle a collective problem. To decide whether such circumstances are present according to the Quran, which are the pre-requisites of polygamy, is the responsibility of the society and not of individuals themselves. In conclusion, as far as the individuals are concerned, they are not permitted to marry more than one wife.

Let us go a step forward. You have seen that according to the Quran, the aim of Nikah is to have a life of amiable comradeship. As long as there is camaraderie, this aim is being fulfilled. The question which is then raised is, if circumstances develop where due to some reason companionship is no longer possible, then what happens?

## **Divorce**

Then what? Separation. What else? Keeping two conflicting elements together can only result in disruption. That is why the Quran calls the Nikah a contract. This separation in Quran's diction is called a divorce; that is, being released from the restrictions of the contract. But just as the Quran has

repeatedly asked that prior to making the contract, you contemplate and coolly think the overall pros and cons, in the same manner it asks you to dissolve the contract extremely thoughtfully and in a considerate manner. In the Quran family life is so important, that all the details of dissolving this contract have been fixed. It says that if a husband and a wife have a dispute, then they should sort out their differences by mutual discussions and negotiations. However, if the differences become worse and turn sour, then Quran does not leave it to the two of them; rather makes it a collective and social concern and asks the society to solve it:

If you fear the husband and wife would differ, you should constitute an arbitration board that should consist of a member from the husband's family and a member from the wife's family. If these arbitrators try, in the light of God's law to set things right, then some workable solution could be found (4:35).

This is so because the aim is to eliminate the differences and to regularize the relationship, and not to try to sever the relationship. But if this arbitration board fails in its efforts and they conclude that the companionship cannot endure any longer, then they should present their report to the court. If they themselves have the jurisdiction or powers to give the final decision, then they would decide themselves. This contract would thus be dissolved.

Here you will ask, if this is how a divorce procedure takes place according to the Quran, then what is that when a wife accidentally adds more salt to the curry and the husband cannot stand it, he just has to utter the word "Divorce" three times, and the poor wife is miserably banished to her parents' house?

Sometimes the husband and wife quarrel, and both agree to separate. However, the husband decides neither to divorce her nor to bring her home, and thus makes her languish by his vacillation. What about this?

What else can it be, but the ridiculing of Religion? The underlying sentiment in it is the same, that men are rulers over the women. They have all the powers. Women are their slaves. Men are their supervisors. As long as the despot wishes, he keeps a woman in the house. When he is angry, he turns her out. Alternatively he lets her dangle, neither keeping her as a wife nor releasing her as a divorcee. To these dictators, a woman does not even have the option to ask as to why she is being treated so, and for which crime? (81:9).

## Iddat

What happens after the divorce? They would both be allowed to choose new partners if they wished. But the woman would have to wait for a little while. The waiting period called "Iddat". Ordinarily this is three months, but if the woman is pregnant then she will have to wait till her delivery. During this waiting period, all her expenses would be borne by her ex-husband. A woman cannot marry again during the period of Iddat except that, if her ex-husband regrets having divorced her, then he can marry her again during this period. This is the only prerogative which men have been given; that is, there is no waiting period (Iddat) for a man. If he wants to marry again after divorcing his wife he can, but a woman has to wait to complete the duration of 'Iddat' before she marries again.

## Man's Prerogative

The reason is quite clear. Quran's general rule is, whatever rights men have over women, women, too, have similar rights over men (2:228). But during the waiting period (Iddat), the ex-husband can marry and that is the only extra privilege men have (2:228). If during the waiting period, or after it, both of them get married again with mutual consent, then their marital life would start again. After this, if again their relationship becomes strained and they divorce each other, then again during Iddat or after it, they can still marry. (This is because it was the second divorce.) But after this, if they

divorce each other for the third time, then they cannot marry again, neither during the waiting period nor after it. The aim of this is to keep the marriage sailing, and is not to be treated lightly. After the third divorce, this woman has to marry someone else and not her previous husband. (If it so happens that the second husband, too, divorces her or if she is widowed, then there is no restriction on marrying her first husband).

As I have written above, the divorce is not an individual decision. A man cannot divorce whenever he likes. It is a problem to be decided upon by the social system, or by the court. For this, just as a man has the right to resort to a law court, the woman has the same right, too; whenever there are differences to be resolved. Just as a woman cannot bind a man forcibly to the contract of Nikah, in the same manner a man, too, cannot coerce a woman to keep the same. The basic condition of Nikah is companionship, which is quite contrary to coercion. If there is no companionship, then how can you keep a Nikah?

My dear girl, these are the laws concerning marriage and divorce according to the Quran. Do go over them and reflect. Are the woman's rights any less than the man's? Is there any scope for men to rule over and supervise women? By now you must be wondering from where, despite such clear injunctions, have we acquired what actually is happening? The answer is easy: wherever the rest of the "religion" has come from, this, too, has come from the same source. Which aspect of 'religion' tallies with Quran, for us? Why should it be surprising in respect of family life? In the earlier era of the world, society in general was matriarchal. The woman's position in a family was like a ruler. Old Arab society, too, was organized on these lines, but on their right and left the two big civilizations, namely Byzantine and Persian, were patriarchal and were governed by men.

## **Peculiarity of Islam**

Just before the advent of Islam, Arabs, too, had started accepting the influence of these civilizations and their society had started bearing the signs of man's supremacy. The advent of Islam changed altogether the complexion of the society. Here neither the man nor the woman was to govern. Here they had been portrayed equal, to walk side by side in their life. These were the Quranic laws. But later when monarchy seeped into Muslims, Byzantinian and specially the Persian civilization, was absorbed into their collective and individual lives. Man's position in society changed into that of a Lord and Master. This was the period when Quranic Islam was being changed into a new Islam which is prevalent amongst us till today. The laws governing our family life today belong to this new Islam, and have nothing to do with the Quran. Since this Islam is a product of kingship and priesthood, coercion is its hallmark. Mind and body are both under stress. Such an oppressive society is always seeking the proverbial lamb, like a wolf. Expecting a woman to have a dignified human status in such a society is idle thinking. This oppression has led woman to take revenge, wherever she has been given freedom. As such, companionship has been non-existent in both the old and the modern society. Neither of these were formed on Quranic lines. Society has become a victim of different kinds of excesses and discriminations. For a peaceful co-habitation, there is no other option but to reject the man-made norms and modern transgressions, and build up society from scratch, within Quranic limits. This is the way to get that long lost paradise from which, and for which, the expelled Adam is still longing.

Turning to the tales of woe of our oppressed women, you may have written these tales from your imagination, but I come across true stories from morning till evening. My dear daughter, I feel like a doctor, as whoever comes to me brings a harrowing story. Doctors perhaps learn to bear with mishaps. But you know me; what a sensitive person I happen to be, specially for women and children. The narrator goes away after telling his or somebody else's story, but I cannot sleep the whole night after hearing it. You do not know Tahira, how many innocent girls have become a burden for their parents, because they do not have enough money to fulfil the demands of these so called 'gentlemen' who come to take the girls' hands in marriage. These girls do not utter a word but the facts of their condition play havoc with them and reduce them to ashes.

## Repressed Women

How many oppressed girls are tied with a nuptial knot, against their wishes to wolves in lamb's clothing; men about whom everyone knows that they have been sowing their wild oats all their lives. But these poor tongue-tied girls cannot let a word escape their lips. So many innocent girls are so hounded by our so called "civilized scoundrels", that they are driven to commit suicide. When even the last remnant of gold is snatched away from them, they are asked to go to their parents' home to get more money. If they cannot oblige, they are subjected to violence and their bones are broken. There are so many girls who are not allowed to live in their husbands' homes; neither are they divorced. They are threatened and asked to procure a certain sum or else are condemned to live in their parents' homes. Further there are so many sick and weak girls who have borne four or five children by the age of twenty, and they do not have enough in the home to eat. They work all day, look after their children and have to bear their husbands' cruelty because they are their "gods on earth". There are so many homes in which they cope with poverty, but the minute the husband has a few more pennies, he starts thinking of marrying for a second time and the former wife is kicked out of the house along with her children. Going abroad is another phenomenon. Whoever goes abroad, brings back a foreign wife. The first wife is left to rot while the Ma'an is enjoying life. Is there nobody to ask them about their shamelessness on having abandoned the first family? Why "shame"? They tell you that the "righteous law" allows them. So who are you to check?

This hell in our society plays havoc with the physical state of at least sixty percent or seventy percent of the girls, and they simply fizzle out of this world. I am told by the doctors every other day that the female patients who have advanced TB, but who have children in their laps, and are expecting another one. Dear Tahira, what can I say about how I feel when I hear of such instances? If a man has one daughter, he would worry only about her. But I lament over all these daughters and I do not shed these helpless tears for them, but over my own helplessness. Whenever I hear a harrowing tale, I think that the responsible person should be severely taken to task and punished. But after this tale of woe is finished, then the question arises as to what could be done under these circumstances. Except for shedding tears, we cannot do anything. This is that constant agony Tahira, through which your Uncle has to pass.

Now you ask about its remedy! It cannot be remedied on an individual basis. When this kind of cancerous growth has gone so far in a society, then it cannot be treated individually. It can only be remedied by changing the entire society. This is similar to what the Quran has referred to as: "Change this earth and the sky". Not until we change this society to a Quranic society, will there be hope of any betterment. If we can make it possible by some other means, then this Quranic assertion that no man-made law or system can take its place, would not hold. Prior to this time (under the British regime) we could not make this social revolution come true. But after the inception of Pakistan, we should have had no difficulty in implementing it. Now we can formulate our own laws and obviously our society would behave by the provisions of the laws. Besides the law, our education system is also under our control. With appropriate education we can guide our children on the right track. This would then make them change the wrong trends in the society voluntarily. This is all in our own control. But how unfortunate that nation is, which stays sick in spite of the fact that it has cures for all its ills! But we bolt the door from within and then complain that there is no way out.

This is all for now. God be with you. When is Saleem hoping to come back? I am sending a letter to him through the same post as yours.

Peace be with you!

**Parwez**  
**August 15, 1953**

## [Home](#) **Second Wife**

### *Fourth Letter to Tahira*

No, my dear girl, not like this. Sabira underwent the same thing that happened to that princess who was unpacking the magic needles. Do you remember that story or have you forgotten it? As a child you used to love hearing that story. You used to hear those stories to go off to sleep, whereas now I want to tell you the same stories to wake you up. They are the same stories except that their purpose has been changed. This does not happen particularly to you; even great nations undergo the same process. During their period of downfall, nations listen to the anecdotes of their past to be able to sleep (The sleep of death). And for awakened nations, the same stories wake them up to a new life. How a story affects, depends more on the listener rather than the story itself.

### **Story of the Princess**

As far as I remember, the story of the Princess was like this. One day she found in her garden a prince charming, lying quite still and unconscious. The whole of his body had been pierced with pins. This scene frightened the Princess. She was about to run away screaming when she heard a voice from somewhere, beckoning her not to feel afraid. The Prince was under a magic spell, the voice told her. These needles could be removed from the body, one per day. When the last needle would come off, the Prince would open his eyes and he will marry the first woman he sets his eyes on. The Princess felt better and she started taking out those needles, one everyday. It took her days, months, even years. But the Princess, unmindful of everything in the world, kept on taking off those needles. Her advancing years were a source of apprehension for her parents and well-wishers. They were all accusing her of running after a mirage. But she would not listen to anyone, shunning all the luxuries of the world. She was following her craze of the Prince and his needles. She kept working on it for twelve years. Now there were only a few needles left-eight, six, four, two and then one. When the last needle was left, the Princess's happiness knew no bounds. Her whole world was awakening. She was imagining how the Prince would wake up smiling and how they would get married; how her dream of twelve years would come true. She thought she should don her bridal dress before she takes out the last needle. So she busied herself in getting ready. She had a maid who knew everything. The minute the Princess turned her back, the maid guiltily took off the last needle. The removal of the last needle made the Prince wake up smiling, and thanking the maid a thousand times for his release, he took her away to get married. When the Princess came back after having her bath and changing, she found the Prince missing. She could not bear this shock and lost her mind. That maid became the Princess and the mad Princess started gleaning the cities and jungles for her Prince.

This was the story that your Grandma used to tell to you before you went to sleep. And after hearing this story you used to remark angrily, "If I could get hold of that maid, I will tie her to a tree and beat her black and blue until she releases the Prince to the Princess!"

### **Zaidi and Sabira**

My daughter, the same thing happened to Sabira. Zaidi and Sabira were brought up in the same home. Zaidi lost his father in his childhood, and his father's brother accepted this orphan as his child. Sabira and Zaidi grew up together. Girls in general are more sensitive and delicate compared to boys, but Sabira in particular was more understanding and gentle. When she came to know that Zaidi was an orphan, she felt more sympathetic towards him. She would display her feelings by saving whatever fruit or sweet she got and giving it to him quietly on his return from school. In the same manner whatever monetary gifts she would receive on Eid, she would give them to Zaidi. In childhood the motive for her innocent sympathies was that Zaidi did not have a father. Perhaps because of these sympathetic gestures, or may be due to some unconscious sentiments, even Zaidi, in his heart, kept

on becoming closer to Sabira. Until one day when he matriculated he whispered to his aunt, his wish of getting married to Sabira. Everybody in the family opposed this proposal tooth and nail, including Sabira's mother. Zaidi's widowed mother was very much in favour of this match but her poverty and widowhood were blocking her way. She could not dare mention such a proposal. This friction remained in a family for sometime, and Sabira remained silent. One day while talking to a neighbour, it slipped from Sabira's mother, "How could she marry her daughter to a person who had been brought up on their charity?" When Sabira heard this, she could not contain herself and breaking the ice, she told her mother that it was no good that she hated an orphan. "God ordains us to respect them. Now come what may, I am going to marry this poor orphan".

Zaidi always used to say, that the best day in his life was when Sabira asserted her will in front of her mother. Therefore, they got married.

### **Sabira's Thriftiness**

Sabira was a thrifty girl. In fact a clerk lives from hand to mouth. Over and above themselves, it was his family of two brothers, a sister and a widowed mother to be procured for and a loan of his father to be paid. But Sabira managing the house so efficiently that nobody could guess that they were so poor. This management included quite a bit of sacrifice on the part of Sabira in favour of her husband and his family. Whenever she had some free time she used to collect some sewing orders from the neighbourhood, which used to supplement her income. Sabira had to work very hard but she was happy to see her husband happy and the thought of being able to look after and fully support a poor and needy family used to make her feel good.

Zaidi was quite contented, but for a wish that he could get, better education. When Sabira noticed her husband's chagrin, she started encouraging him. She first suggested that after office hours, he join some evening classes in a college. But to do this Zaidi had to give up that tuition which he was giving for the last one year to earn twenty-five rupees. This idea was blocking Zaidi's way. Sabira solved this problem by herself teaching three neighbouring children in the evening for thirty rupees per month. Gradually Zaidi obtained his BA degree. After this he wanted to do his LLB degree to become a lawyer. For this he had to give up his job because in those days, there were no evening classes for law.

### **Sacrifice and Hard-work**

This stage was very difficult (in fact it was rather impossible). But Sabira told Zaidi not to worry. "If this is what you intend to do then leave your job. I shall start teaching children during the day and work harder with my sewing. You continue your law education. I will look after myself and procure for your education too." So Zaidi joined Law College and Sabira surprised the world by putting her words into action and did exactly what she said she would do. She used to be so busy that on some days, she would only get three or four hours of sleep. She was working hard constantly, even with her little daughter in her lap. She had a lovely innocent little girl.

Sabira constantly kept taking the needles off her 'Prince'. When Zaidi cleared his LLB, Sabira thought her ordeal would be over, too. She would have some respite. Working so hard for day and night had taken its toll on Sabira's health. But she did not care much for it. She was happy that her husband's wish had been fulfilled. (And perhaps the subconscious feeling that she was fulfilling all the deprivations, which Zaidi had suffered because he was an orphan.)

Sabira could see that contentment still eluded Zaidi. There was something, which still troubled him. She tried asking him many times but Zaidi brushed her inquiries away. At last one day, upon her insistence, Zaidi told her what he had been wishing since his childhood, that he would go abroad and become a barrister. He would then be a big leader. People would come to listen to his speeches and would take him out in processions. They would be cheering him heartily. "Then I would become a

member of the assembly and later a minister. But all these wishes seemed to be destined to remain buried in my heart. I am not worried for my mother since she is living with the younger brother. I am worried on your account only. If you could fend for yourself, then I could go abroad for my higher education. But there seems to be no way out of this predicament". Sabira listened to all this very carefully, but did not reply. After two or three days she said to Zaidi, "I have done some deliberation over this problem. Do not worry on my account. I can fend for myself and our daughter. You go ahead. May God fulfil your intentions; and it would be my pleasure to see your efforts bear fruit. The biggest hurdle is the fare to go abroad. Make my jewellery your stepping stone; and there is nothing else to worry about".

Zaidi was stunned to hear this. His eyes were moist and he could not speak. He hugged Sabira and cried. When after a while he could control his emotions, he could only stammer and say, "Sabira, you are an angel from heaven and not a woman. You should be adored. I did not deserve you. There is nobody on this earth luckier than I am who has got a wife like you. Whatever I am feeling, I do not know how to express it. Sabira, you really deserve all the adoration. All your life has been one of constant love and sacrifice and I feel so ashamed that I have not been able to do much for you. Rather I have been the cause of so much worry and discomfort to you. This was quite naive on my part to be wishing to go abroad. I know you'll have to undergo a lot of inconvenience for it. I do not want to trouble you any more. I give up the idea of going abroad. This is no justice that I would have all my wishes fulfilled and you undergo a life of constant worry. No Sabira, I cannot do that".

Zaidi wanted to say something more but Sabira cut him short by saying that if husband and wife, too, started thinking in terms of "you and me", then where else would one get cordial relationship? "You were the one to tell me that Nikah literally means this kind of relationship, like sleep in the eyes. Therefore, why do you differentiate between discomfort and happiness between husband and wife? Fulfilling all your wishes is my pleasure. This is my decision that you must go abroad. Or rather let us say now it is my wish, which is necessary for you to fulfil".

Meanwhile she heard the baby cry and Sabira went to her.

A few days passed arguing about the issue. Zaidi would say he would not go and Sabira would insist that he should, until the day arrived when Sabira went to the station to see Zaidi off. He was crying already; when he picked up his daughter in his arms he started sobbing violently. Now Sabira, too, could not control herself and her cheeks were wet with warm tears. The train left and Sabira did not have even the fare money so that she could reach her parents' home. Zaidi noted all that in an article in a magazine published abroad. The heading of that article was "Unbelievable".

Sabira went to a friend of hers, Parveen, to borrow some money so that she could reach her parents' place. Parveen after hearing everything smiled and casually said: "You should have gone along with Zaidi abroad yourself. Never trust these men. If he brought a Ma'am from abroad then what would you do"?

Parveen said all that casually and in a joking manner but Sabira felt like strangling her friend, she felt so bad. She controlled herself with difficulty and just said, "Parveen, you do not know how much you have insulted me by saying this. You did not understand whom were you talking about? You could not understand Nahid's father. You do not know how far above ordinary men he is? You do not know what he is? Parveen, come what may he would not look at another woman in the whole world"? Parveen felt sorry for having hurt her friend.

## **Trials of Sabira**

Sabira went to her father's house. He was a poor man and lived in a small town where Sabira could not get any children to teach or any tailoring assignments either. She was surrounded by misfortune but she was not discouraged by them. Her hard work and intelligence came to her rescue and she kept

fending for herself and for her daughter. Sometimes she was even able to send some gift to Zaidi. This hard work told upon her health, but if all this had any compensation, then that was her daughter's smiles and her husband's loving and thankful letters. So when she used to lie down at night, tired, she would hug her daughter and would start thinking of the easy life ahead. She would count the days after which Zaidi would come back; then she used to weave her web of happiness and would imagine how heavenly how heavenly it would be when he would come back. She would be able to gather all the happiness in the world along with her husband and daughter. There would be songs of joy on her lips. Her eyes used to get moist with such happy thoughts, and then would go off to sleep, enclosing her tears of joy within her eye-lids as a pearl does in its chamber under the waves of the ocean, forgetting all the trials and tribulations of life.

Sabira kept on taking out the needles from her 'prince's body until just a few were left. As these needles kept on becoming less and less, they brought back the freshness on Sabira's face. Now there were a few months left for Zaidi's return. But Sabira felt that just as she was becoming more enthusiastic about his coming back, his letters had become devoid of love and more mechanical, and their frequency became less than before. It had been a constant link before and she, due to her preoccupation, had to excuse herself for not replying sooner, Now it was the other way round. Sabira had to complain for not getting a reply to all her letters. The 'needles' were becoming less and less, but Sabira's heart had been pounding quicker than before. She could not understand the reason for this change. Sometimes she would have apprehensive and eerie ideas, but then she would brush them off as superstitions. She would ask Zaidi about the date of his coming back but he would beat about the bush; and the estimated date of return passed and Zaidi did not come. Now Sabira became tongue-tied. Many weeks passed. It had been so many days since she had heard from Zaidi. One day Sabira was sitting quietly, thinking about this, when the postman called. Sabira eagerly went to the front door and took the letter. It was of foreign mail. She opened it hurriedly only to find a newspaper cutting inside the envelope. It was a photograph of Zaidi, along with a young girl, and the caption read, "This newly married couple is proceeding to Switzerland for their honeymoon." Sabira staggered and fell down. When she opened her eyes, she was in a hospital. The doctor motioned the nurse to show her Nahid. Sabira patted her daughter's head and said in a stammer, "My dear, I still have to live for you". And she fainted again.

After a few days the hard-boiled Sabira came home. She did not write anything to Zaidi. Neither did he write any letter. However, Sabira's old father wrote a letter to Zaidi. In reply to that he wrote back: "I do not know what crime I have committed to deserve this dressing down which I am getting. When religious law allows it, then who are you to be objecting to it? I care for Sabira more than you. I am responsible for them morally and religiously. I am not a mean person that I shall be evading my responsibilities. I am a gentleman and I intend fulfilling my obligations like a gentleman. Sabira can live wherever she feels happy. Her happiness would be my happiness. I will keep on sending her maintenance. If she wants to follow another path for her life, even then I would not be a stumbling block. I have already said that her happiness makes me happy, too." When Sabira's father replied this letter, Zaidi's next letter contained a divorce for Sabira.

Dear Tahira, take heart and wipe off your tears and read the whole letter. Look at me. How do I start relating these stories to you, with a heavy heart? Either do not ask me to tell you such harrowing stories, or if you do ask, then have a heart to be able to listen to such tales of woe.

Now Mr. Salahudin Ahmed Zaidi, Bar-at-Law, is leading a gilt edged life. A palace to live in; a car; servants; separate servant and nurses for the Madam; Nanny for children. He has attained a high status in modern society because both husband and wife are quite social. They are known in the clubs. Newspapers take a note of them, too. Now he is thinking of becoming a leader. Since it is easier to become a leader through religion, Mr. Zaidi is advising the nation to become "true and real Muslims". He delivers emotional speeches about Islam. He writes lengthy articles in which he tries to depict the true picture of Islam. He is about to become a leader, and you know that a Ministry is two steps away.

## **Sabira's Condition**

He is leading this kind of posh life and poor Sabira, on the other hand, is marking time on her life in her parents' home. Nobody has ever heard her talk about this topic. But we have heard that when Nahid pesters her for a story at night, then she relates the story of the prince with needles, whereupon Nahid goes off to sleep. But Sabira keeps on laughing her crazy laughter. Sometimes she automatically utters words such as "Religious law", "morality" "gentle manliness", "responsibility", and then laughs out so loudly that it sometimes wakes up the people at home. Then her old father comes and says only this, "Dear Sabira, take heart. You said you would live for Nahid. This brings Sabira to tears, tears that are wiped by Mary's cloak, and then Sabira goes off to sleep.

## **Who is the Culprit?**

I agree with you Tahira. Here Zaidi is not the only culprit. The bigger culprit is our society which not only recognizes such culprits, but gives them a high status. Whereas these people should not be allowed to come near decent people. The humanitarian level is far too high, but if viewed from even a very mundane level, it would be quite clear that if, for his ordinary wishes, a person can betray a wife like Sabira, could he be trusted in other matters? But our society is at fault. If our society could focus on the correct angle, then these type of wolves in lambs clothing could be chastised in no time.

But Tahira, I want you to attend to another aspect. Leave alone Zaidi and the society. What would you say about that the woman who knowingly destroyed a home? She knew everything, still she destroyed a member of her own sex. If only she would have cared a little bit, Zaidi could not indulge in such an annoying act in humanity. Whereas our society is raising Zaidi on a high pedestal, our women of high society are (in whose predicament you remain so gloomy) accepting Mrs. Zaidi like a sacred idol. What do you think of them?

Therefore, my daughter, everything here is chaotic; and women all riding the same boat. Thank Goodness, Saleem came back safely, otherwise if he, too, would have quoted the 'religious laws', saying that the Shariat permits it. Then what could I or you have done? This dagger is not only on people going abroad, here, too, it keeps on dangling. Which area can boast of not having a house dismantled this way? Which lane does not hear the sobs and sighs of people like Sabira? These sighs could belong to those who have been divorced or those who had to put up with the usurpers. My dear daughter, I keep on praying for you (and for daughters like you), for the stability of your marriage. May you and your children and your grand children prosper. May you be happy and may your homes be safe from any kind of disintegration. I cannot do anything more than praying, although I know that such chaotic society cannot be set right with prayers or good wishes only. Its remedy could only be effected if it could be re-constructed on purely Quranic lines.

God be with you

**Parwez**  
**April 1954**

## [Home](#) **Incompatible Marriages**

### *Fifth Letter to Tahira*

Yes my daughter, you have understood the meaning of "Moaddah" (affection) correctly. In the dark ages Arabs used to bury their daughters alive. The Quran came to eradicate all kinds of cruelty, discrimination and exploitation. Therefore, it is impossible to believe that such a barbaric custom has survived.

### **Custom of Female Infanticide**

The custom was forbidden, and it took a few years for this barbaric and soul-searing custom to be eradicated from this world completely. The Quran has mentioned in its typical attractive and logical style, that when that innocent girl would present her case before God against her murderer, the father, then the criminal would be asked as to what crime this helpless innocent life had committed for which he, the killer, had been so cruel to her. What answer will he have? It is so obvious.

Muslims are happy that, by the grace of God, this earth-shaking barbaric custom came to an end. It is worth celebrating. But Tahira, if you look a bit deeper, you will see that this beastly and inhuman custom still prevails in the world. Perhaps you will wonder as to which lawless land can still practise such a degrading custom, during this age of civilization, culture and enlightenment. A custom in which people still bury their daughters alive! But you will be extremely amazed when you are told that this heart-rending custom is actually being practiced in our country, by our nation and in our homes. We see this high-handedness, and do not feel for it at all. We ignore references to this custom in the Quran, by saying that it is about dark period of the Arabs that this horrible custom refers to, and that it has nothing to do with us.

### **Custom Is Still Alive!**

Tahira, you know that the Quran considers every unjustified murder to be the worst crime. But this type of 'murder' (burying girls alive) is most horrible and barbaric because it involves a helpless baby, too young and unable of defending herself, and this makes it most unjustified murder. Just look around you and see how many such murders are committed right in front of your eyes. Moreover, the murderer goes about (blatantly) and displaying the blood on his sleeves, and none of the minnows of law and order can apprehend him.

Tahira, I can well imagine the torment your heart might be passing through after reading the above line; and I can well imagine your inquisitive eye looking in vain for signs of such unjustified murder. But I really wonder whether your searching eye, looking far and wide, noticing this little baby Zubaida who has been deprived of her mother and is now being reared by her maternal grandmother. Perhaps, you have not seen her deceased mother or you do not know how she died.

### **Waywardness of Rasheed**

You may not even know that this girl is the daughter of Rasheed, who was arrested and imprisoned the other day from his gambling den. Rasheed's waywardness is not new. He has been like that since his childhood. He was still small when his father died. In a nation that has lost its collective life, its orphans either starve to death; or if they are well provided for at home but are without the guidance of a proper guardian, they become wayward and insolent. (It is a great achievement to be able to display real good character while having led the life as an orphan). As a child Rasheed was the apple of his mother's eye but, as he grew up, he started keeping bad company. His waywardness was no secret. Sometimes some elder members of the family would chastise him, but it was not really like the concern of a real father who, even if his child was being insolent or rude would still do not give up

worrying about its welfare. Mother used to simmer with anguish but who would listen to her?

## Shakira's Mother

Rasheed was a worthless vagrant, and nobody liked him. But God knows what came into Shakira's mother's head, that she insisted on giving her daughter's hand in marriage to Rasheed. Their family opposed it; relatives and near and dear ones were all against it; and the neighbours and residents of the area, in fact anybody who heard about it, opposed it. But she turned a deaf ear to everybody. Leave alone everybody else, even Rasheed opposed this proposal. But Rasheed's and Shakira's mothers were in favour of it. If ever any body would question Shakira's mother, she would bluntly reply that, "I had given my daughter to my sister, when my baby was still a suckling. Now I shall either send her in a palanquin to my sister's house, or her coffin would depart from my threshold.

Shakira was a serious, quiet, understanding and a sensitive girl. According to the restrictions of our present society, a girl's expression of an opinion about her proposal is considered such a great sin, that there is no atonement for it. Furthermore, Shakira has a taciturn disposition, but sometimes it used to be hinted by her friends and well-wishers that she foresaw the dark future, and that her mother's insistence was her deathknell. Her last ray of hope was that Rasheed himself was against this proposal. This might save her from hell.

## Wedding

But then it was the obstinacy of Rasheed's mother: "If you oppose me son, I shall take poison and commit suicide. I have given word to my sister and now I cannot back out of it", she insisted. The result was that they fixed a date, the marriage party came and all the rituals were performed. At the end, just before the send-off, they thought of another custom. The registrar of marriage contracts, the witnesses, and even the bridegroom, all knew about how both of them had been brought together unwillingly. But because of the fear of the groom's mother's annoyance, the bride's social stigma; the witnesses' integrity and the Priest's greed for his fee, nothing was considered amiss in the "will of God" and the Nabi's Sunnah. The marriage ceremony was performed. The relevant sermon was delivered. People offered lengthy supplications. Trumpets were blared, congratulations were bestowed. The Bride was brought home, which was suitably adorned. Tahira, just ponder on that relationship of matrimony (Nikah) which Quran calls a solemn covenant (4:21), and the prime condition for which is that both parties execute it willingly. Only pondering over all its aspects, should anything be decided for the future. But performing it the way it was performed for Shakira is openly ridiculing the divine law. Now we treat matrimony as a trivial custom, and the Priest recites a few memorized verses meant for such an occasion. Even, if they take those verses seriously, they would discover many a marital bliss in them, (but talk about matrimony only, the whole of Din has become a lifeless ritual to us.)

Anyway, this was how Shakira started her married life. She reached her in-laws place. Nothing special happened, and time passed. But it could be seen that rosy Shakira was gradually turning into an autumn leaf. Although she tried her best to tactfully prevent Rasheed from his misdeeds, by covering up, or by serving him well, or by many sacrifices, Rasheed was a gone case. In the beginning it was indifference which gradually turned into hate and then enmity. At home she had the solace of her mother-in-law's company, but adversity does not strike alone. In less than a year Rasheed's mother passed away. Now Shakira became more helpless and Rasheed more dauntless. He frequented the house less and less, and mostly would remain out. Shakira's jewellery was the only attraction for him at home. Whenever he needed them, he would come to snatch them away. Shakira's simple father was a poor man, and although he could have afforded a few morsels for his daughter, Shakira was "thankful" person and literally lived up to her name; she would never let anybody know that she was starving. Her parents' house was just next door, but she would not let them know about her toils. Quietly she tried her hand at earning something, but there could never be a stable means of livelihood for a tormented girl. She had to work extremely hard to earn a pittance. By the grace of

God the whole locality knew her and they were all in fact her near relatives. She used to see all the goodies coming to other houses, but she never manifested any discontentment. Many a time it happened that as she was about to her first meal of the day, Rasheed gate-crashed from somewhere and Shakira would quietly put that meal in front of him. He had his meal and went out grumbling (one never knows he might be beating her, taking with him whatever he saw in the house worth taking.)

As I have mentioned, the whole of that locality consisted of her relations. But, Tahira, this is the biggest curse of an individualistic life-style. In times of need you are alone. As you have seen, Shakira's poor father was a simple man. All he could do as a last resort was to implore Rasheed and to serve him to the best of his capacity. But this kind of sacrifice is appreciated only where there is a fraction of humanity left. But Rasheed used to receive all these gestures of goodwill from his poor in-laws as his right, and expected them to feel obliged. Despite all this Shakira never complained. The agony took its toll but she never let anybody know. She would cry when alone, but nobody ever saw her eyes moist. Her condition became known when her constant crying affected her eye-sight. Her eyes ached for two months. When she was slightly better, it was discovered that her eye-sight had become quite weak. Now she could not do any of those things through which she previously used to earn money. Whatever was in the house was gradually taken by Rasheed. Finally Shakira could not hide her malady. She had become skin and bones. Her friends would suggest that it was no use worrying, because worrying would not help. She would hear them and smile, and you could see every pain written in her eyes in bold letters. She would become quiet, and her condition kept on deteriorating day by day. Rasheed could not care less that a precious life was dwindling. Goodness knows since when she was having fever, but she never told anybody. When it became constant, it was discovered that she was suffering from chronic fever. It was winter and on one cold evening, somebody mentioned that police had arrested Rasheed on some vagrancy charges, and that they were not letting him off because he could not pay the required ten rupees. Shakira was wearing a woolen shawl, her last asset and her life-line. She got up quietly and sent it to neighbour for it to be sold. Although it was a fine shawl, she could hardly get ten rupees for it. She took the money and gave it to Rasheed's uncle to pay the fine. Now she could not even protect herself against cold. Fever persisted and her life was like a lamp on its last flicker. With difficulty, her mother brought Shakira to her house and whatever treatment she could afford, was being given to her daughter.

Shakira had become all the more quiet. When she saw her parents struggling for medicines or resorting to prayers for her well-being, she would ask a friend of hers to tell parents not to resort to any treatment, and to let her die.

## **Eternal Silence**

Rasheed never turned up, even by chance, to inquire about her welfare. Then one day he did come and sat near Shakira's bed-head. She looked up raising her eye-lashes, saw Rasheed and smiled, the same smile that would reveal the depth of her heart on seeing every new trouble, and which was like a surgeon's knife cutting through all our man-made laws and restrictions. A tear came to her eyes, her eye-lashes became moist and a hiccup broke the last life-line. And Shakira, the picture of quiet anguish, was eternally silenced.

Dear Tahira, just think, can there be any instances more distressing and inhuman than this? Just ponder how many such innocent lives are wasted because of this repression. And your society does not bat an eye for them. Tahira, you will say that corrective measures are being adopted to ameliorate such cruelties. Last year a law for the right of women to divorce was promulgated, to remedy such obstacles. There is no doubt about the good intention of such corrective suggestions. But what generally happens is that such corrective measures, instead of being beneficial for genuine cases, become manipulative tools in the hands of fraudulent people and as such defeat their purpose. Instead of eradicating the cases of evil, our corrective steps get bogged down and meet with little success.

## **Reformation**

It is no use applying ointment to the eruptions and boils of a patient whose blood is contaminated. One eruption would be cured but two more would surface elsewhere. The real remedy would be to purify the blood. Today the whole structure of our society is disintegrating. Therefore the real remedy would be its reformation and reconstruction from scratch. The foundations of such new construction should not be laid merely on the letter of the law, but on spirit of the law, too. Unless and until one adheres to the spirit of the law there could be no change in people's hearts and minds. No aspect of society could be reformed because the change depends upon the change in minds and hearts of the people. This change is not possible unless and until man-made laws are replaced by Divine laws.

God be with you!

**Parwez**  
**June 1954**

## [Home](#) **Demand For Dowry**

### *Sixth Letter to Tahira*

My dear, this time I received your letter quite late. Saleem's letter told me about your welfare. I have seen that your guesses about age are generally incorrect. Shafqat must be at least twenty-seven or twenty-eight years of age. She used to carry you around, although she was quite small even then. If she was six or seven then, it does not make her less than twenty-seven or twenty-eight now. You were twenty-one last Shaban (lunar month). I know she is so well versed in household chores. She is intelligent, educated, good looking and looks after the whole house. Our girls from good families radiate their beauty through health and modesty. She is healthy and so modest. I have never seen her head uncovered. She talks with downcast eyes. If ever she has to pass in front of me, she passes with such a shrinking manner as if she is about to sink into the earth. She has grown up in front of my eyes and is like a daughter to me. Your surprise is quite justified as to why she has not been able to get a proposal for marriage so far. It is just your misunderstanding that no boy comes up to the mark in her father's eyes or that her mother wants a family of high status.

### **Match-making Problems**

The facts are just the opposite. The other day poor Chiragh Ali tearfully related his tale of woe. He was telling me that proper proposals are available. Women do come to look up the girl and like her, but after that it is inquired as to what she would get as dowry? He was saying that Shafqat's mother has prepared a reasonable dowry for her. In our homes people start preparing the dowry from the day a girl is born. Gradually then, clothes, jewellery, utensils and other necessities of a home are all ready to be given to the girl. All those things are ready for Shafqat, too. But these days these things are not considered as dowry. Somebody demands a motor car; and somebody wants a bungalow; and somebody is wishing for ten thousand rupees in cash. He was telling that a few days ago there was a proposal from a place called Teergaron's locality. The boy is a matriculate with a salary of sixty rupees per month, but his demand is to study abroad. If we can afford it then he will marry our girl. (Whereas Shafqat has a bachelor degree). Shafqat's father was relating this story and was becoming besides himself with anger and grief. With a sobbing voice he said, "I have forgone many conveniences, even lived hand to mouth, but I saw to it that my daughters are well brought up and gave them a good education. Now to send them off from the house you need thousands of rupees. Whatever I spent on their education, if I had been saving it, surely I would have the amount which is being demanded now. Just see how people think; if an uneducated girl brings along ten thousand rupees, then they accept it. But if the same amount has been spent on her education, then they do not value it and nobody inquires about such a girl. Her crime? Her crime is nothing except that she had a 'foolish' father who preferred educating his daughters and now he is too poor to give bungalows and cars in dowry. So these innocent girls have to pay the price of the crime, my dear brother". (He is older than I am but he always addresses me with respect. They are love and sincerity personified. My dear Tahira, after they depart, you would not find such people even if you leave no stone unturned in search for them. There are very few people who might be knowing that brother Chiragh Ali and I have merely been living in the same locality. Generally people think I am his elder brother.)

### **Demand for Dowry**

Brother Chiragh Ali continued then: "Only I and my God know how I sent off my eldest daughter Ismat from my home. Now it is Shafqat and two more younger daughters, also grown up. Now you tell me, at my age how do I fulfil the dowry demands. My dear brother, when I go home in the evening, the sight of these three grown up girls makes my heart sink. But the thought that my moroseness may affect them adversely, I smile a fake smile in return to their greeting me. When I face the food, each morsel feels like poison going down my throat. When your sister asks about my

success in this respect, I only sigh and she starts crying involuntarily. I do not have a house which I could sell or a property which I could pawn. Firstly nobody would lend such a large amount. Secondly, even if I could borrow it, a big chunk of my salary would go towards paying the installments. Then what would be left to feed the children?"

Dear Tahira! Did you hear why Shafqat does not get a proposal? Every time brother Chiragh Ali tells me his harrowing tale, I wonder why the sky does not fall upon us, or the earth does not give way. Just think, most of us have boys as well as girls. (Poor Chiragh Ali has daughters only, he does not have a boy). But other homes do have both, boys and girls. We all demand dowry worth thousands of rupees when we want to marry our boys, never thinking that tomorrow when we have to marry off our daughters, where would we get all that money from? All of us, whether rich or poor, have to face these worries when we have to marry our daughters, but there is nobody who would forward a remedy for this universal (and self-created) malady.

## Dirty Mentality

Tahira, have you ever wondered what kind of mentality produces these demands for dowry? The mentality that thinks that a woman's status anyway is inferior to man. Since a woman is inferior, when a man bestows the honour of making her his wife, he encashes this investiture, and the price is called the Dowry. You did witness the bargain of Rehman Kamboh's cow when you went to the village. The bull's owner was not willing to exchange his bull with the cow. Rehman had to pay along fifty rupees with the cow to get the bull. But our girls fare less well than a cow or buffalo. If Rehman had to pay fifty rupees along with the cow, at least he got the bull. Here on the other hand, the girl's side give their girl along with ten thousand rupees. And the boy's family take all this, and then take away their boy, too. Meaning, fifty rupees, the cow and the bull all become the possession of the bull owner. Tell me, have you even seen this kind of bargain being transacted anywhere? Have you ever seen such "useless commodity" whose removal would cost you ten thousand rupees? My dear daughter, this is the status we have given to our girls. A few days ago your uncle Razzaq told me about a good proposal for his daughter. Since the boy's father was no more, he would come himself to talk things over. Razzaq was hesitant to talk to the boy, so he asked me to do so for him. So the boy came to our place. He was gentlemanly, educated and discerning. I liked him.

## The Bargaining

When it came down to the transaction, he simply told me that a motor car should be a must in the dowry. I felt very angry but the girl's side is not supposed to show it, so I asked him gently, "Mister, what is it you are asking the price of? The girl is as much educated as you are; as far as your income is concerned it is less than a joiner. A joiner gets six rupees daily which adds up to one-hundred and eighty rupees per month and you are earning one-hundred and fifty rupees monthly. If the girl wishes to earn, then surely she can get more than you. She is sacrificing for you, and you instead of being grateful for it, are demanding a motor car. It was so obvious he could not answer this, and was rendered speechless. However, we lost that proposal. He struck a bargain elsewhere.

Woebegone, all this is happening among those who call themselves Muslims and after proclaiming themselves Muslims, they say all praise be to Allah. They are proud of calling themselves Muslims. The Islam to which we ascribe ourselves, as I have told you in my previous letters, considers men and women equal in all aspects of life, but in respect of the marriage contract (Nikah), he has given a woman a better status. He has addressed the man by saying that if you want to contract a marriage, you alone are not equal to a woman. You should add a gift to make yourself equal to a woman. This gift is called dower (Meher), which equalizes the deficiency in a man's stature. Therefore the equation is like this:

$$\text{Man} + \text{dower (Meher)} = \text{Woman.}$$

## **Dower (Meher)**

Nowhere does Quran mention that woman should bring something along with her. He requires man to span this deficiency with dower and if he has nothing to give then he should, like Moses, work for his wife's father for eight or ten years (28:27). This is the status of woman according to the Quran. But contrary to it, dower has become a force. Some weddings reverberate with the boastful announcement of dower amounting to a lakh and a quarter (One lakh and twenty-five thousands rupees), which means you do not pay a single penny. Just make a boastful announcement! In some weddings it is announced that Meher is according to the Sharia (Muslims' personal laws), which is an amount of thirty-two rupees. We do not know who told them this. Dower was the value which a man presents to cover up any deficiency on his part, but now we practice quite contrary to what it was meant to be. Dower has been reduced to a mere formality, and the woman has to take something along to become a wife. This something is called dowry. For those who cannot afford it, their daughters' heads start displaying silvery streaks, while they are still at their parents' threshold. Some ill-mentioned go even beyond this. After receiving the dowry they start pestering their wives to 'squeeze' their parents. As long as she keeps bringing something from her parents, she is kept in the house. The minute this source dries up, she is turned out of the house and kept dangling unsure of her fate; or she is divorced altogether. The forlorn dejected girl (along with her children) seeks refuge in her father's house and the husband starts bargaining elsewhere. This happens in our society everyday and there is no protest against it.

## **Hindu Custom**

In India the custom of dowry started from the Hindus. They do not give anything to a girl from her father's property so she is given something as charity. They consider it a virgin-charity Kanyadan. In their society woman lives on charity all her life. As a daughter she gets no share in her father's property, and neither as a wife from her husband's, nor as a mother from her son's property. Therefore her father gives her something in charity upon her wedding. This gradually became dowry, and the Muslims adopted it from there. Now Hindus have abolished this crude custom by law. But Muslims, "praise be to God", are progressing in it. Dowry demands are on the rise day by day. As a result, the poor fellow who gets three or four daughters feels heavily burdened. Sensitive girls feel for their parents' predicament and start blaming themselves. This develops an inferiority complex in them, ultimately leading to various nervous disorders. When they are advanced in age they either become wayward or are driven to commit suicide. Both acts are shunned by the society. It does not feel guilty that, instead of blaming those suppressed and innocent girls, the society which creates such circumstances, should be punished. But Tahira, what is happening here is, "That the one who slaughters is the beneficiary". We do not know when the rule of Quranic law would reign; and when the oppressed would be free of their shackles. My dear daughter, I have been struggling all my life for this. Perhaps you would be able to see its results. Do think of something for that poor Shafqat. She, too, has a right over you or for that matter not just she, every oppressed person has a right over us, because we, too, are responsible for their oppression. Therefore, please do something for that poor girl.

God be with you!

**Parwez**  
**June 1954**

## [Home](#) **Friction Between A Woman And Her Mother-In-Law**

### *Seventh Letter to Tahira*

Yes my daughter, your friend Rasheeda passed away at long last. You wonder as to how she could go away at such a young age and I marvel at the fact, that she survived that long? She was hardly twenty-one or twenty-two years old. Five or six years earlier, she got married. I could sense right from the beginning that there was something that was corroding her inner self. I tried to probe many times but she had locked her heart so completely that nobody could get a clue to it. Three years passed like that. But after this, her absolute quiet, her sad face, her forlorn eyes, her pale complexion and her lost looks, all combined could not hide her predicament. All this was happening inside her but she was absolutely quiet. Then she started running a temperature, which told us that this quiet (volcano or) fire had burned even her bone marrow, which led her to her death.

Rasheeda was such an understanding girl, cognizant and well-versed in domestic affairs. More serious than girls of her age and very sensitive. She was about thirteen or fourteen when her father heard a cleric say that when a girl is physically mature she should not be kept in the house. Until she gets married, associating with her would be illegitimate. So now the problem with her father was not of looking for a good proposal but how to show her out of the house so that he could avoid the great sin of associating with her. To fulfil this religious *Sharia* need for sending his daughter out of his house, became his top priority.

You know it very well that in our homes every matter can be talked about, except a marriage proposal, which is kept a top secret. Special care is taken that the concerned girl does not get an inkling of it.

### **Secrecy**

Rasheeda's parents, too, used to discuss about her proposal secretly. People living around might get to know about it somehow, but everything was to be kept a secret from Rasheeda. Even if she could get to know about it from her mother, it certainly would make no difference, it would have been impossible for Rasheeda to disclose her likeness. In our society if a girl utters a single disapproving word about her prospective proposal, her father feels robbed of his "honour" and he would strangle the "immodest" girl. So it was meaningless whether Rasheeda was kept informed or not. Anyhow, wherever her proposal was being fixed, she abhorred it.

### **Destiny**

But this did not have any impact. Our girls are taught right from the beginning that souls are linked in heaven and therefore, the linked ones are destined to come together on Earth. You get whatever is written in your fate. You cannot obliterate your destiny. Their nuptial knots are tied in heaven and the angels have already performed the (Nikah) marriage contract; on Earth, we just follow a formality. We are told that all these details are "Islamic Law", so there is no question of a girl choosing a proposal.

Rasheeda was a girl with depth of vision and she used to feel that all these things were wrong. Many times she tried and wanted to talk to her mother about it, but every time it happened as if something had got stuck in her throat and she would be forced to remain quiet.

### **The Conscience**

Do you know Tahira what it was that used to prick her and get stuck in her throat? This was that demon which we call "the conscience", and we hold it so sacred that its decisions are considered

godly and its command is regarded as coming directly from heaven. It has become the criterion of everything right or wrong. In reality, however, this "sacred voice" is nothing more than the sum total of our upbringing, environment and beliefs, all having their effect when taken together. This seeps in our hearts since childhood and gradually matures into a certain shape of lasting and deep impression. Do you remember the Jains (a Hindu sect) who used to be your neighbours in Amritsar? The very mention of meat used to make them vomit, whereas your own son Javed, of the same age, used to suck at a bone the whole day. The conscience of a Jain's child would tell him that meat is a bad thing and unholy. But our Javed's conscience never pricked him for eating meat. This was that "voice of conscience" which used to scare Rasheeda like a demon: "You are a girl and a Muslim girl, how could you comment on your proposal?" If only she would have Quranic education before her, she would have shunned the wrong training, the wrong education, the wrong environment and the wrong belief (which she used to think as the voice of her conscience). And she would have proclaimed that according to the law of God, the contract of marriage could be executed only between a consenting boy and girl. Anybody defying it would be rebelling against the law of God, whether it comes from within or without. There is just one infallible voice in the world that cannot go astray, and that is the voice of God as it comes to us through the Quran.

All this was happening at the girl's side while, on the other side, Hameed's marriage was being talked about. Not that he was in a position to be consulted, but the plans at least were not as secret as was done with the girl. Hameed, too, was a discerning boy, so he told his mother that their circumstances did not allow him to get married. (Father has been sick for quite sometime and cannot earn). "The whole family depends on my meager salary. Firstly, if we borrow money for marriage expenses, there will be no way to pay-back. Secondly, some expenses would be incurred due to a new member of the family. How would I cope with all the expenses in the same salary? In these days of inflation, expenses keep on rising, so let the question of marriage be shelved".

On hearing this the mother sighed and said, "Some people were correct when they used to tell me not to send the boy to college because its education leads the good Muslim children astray. I never used to agree with it, but I admit now that they were right".

## God is the Sustainer

"Hameed, you do not seem to believe in God at all. You have started calculating like that. Don't you think that He is the sustainer? You ask, where would this come from, where would that come from? The God who brought us into being, does He not care for our daily bread? The God who looks after life inside stones, would He not look after us? Son, retrace your steps and ask His forgiveness. What kind of thoughts have started coming to your mind? She, who would join our family, will bring her sustenance along. We are nobody to be providing for anybody. The same God is the provider of all. Whatever you are destined to get, you will definitely get it. Nobody can snatch away our destiny from us. If we are destined to be poor, then nobody can change it to riches. If we are destined to starve, then nobody can save us from starvation. God's good people are those who are content with their destiny. This develops contentment in a person. Contentment is so valuable that only special Godly people get it. If you study the lives of God's messengers, leading lights, saints and Godly people, you would see what adversities they had to face and bear".

## Trust in God

"They had no food to eat, no clothes to wear, no house to live in and no bedding either, but they trusted God and remained content in their destiny. God raised their status. Ayub (Job) was very dear to God. His whole body was infected. If ever a germ used to fall off his body, he used to pick it up and put it back in his wounds and used to say 'If you were left on the ground, where would you eat from?' God rewarded his patience and made him His messenger. This is, Son, true belief in God. Satan has put doubts in your mind and you have started thinking about how, if you got married, you would manage with the same salary? Non-salaried people get their sustenance, too. Was our Nabi

(PBUH) getting a salary?"

Hameed's mother said so much in one breath that he could not decide which question to answer, and to end the argument he simply said, "Dear mother, I say just this much. Do not arrange the marriage just now. Wait some time more, till either my salary increases or at least Majeed is through with his college and becomes capable of earning something. Then you can get me married. I am not refusing to marry." His mother cutting him short said, "Son, good proposals do not come by everyday. It is just by the grace of God that sister Sabira's heart is set upon it otherwise we do not deserve a girl like Rasheeda. A beauty with brains, educated, intelligent and discreet. Ever since she has started managing the house, it has turned into a nice abode. Women come to see her from far off places. Could you get such a girl from anywhere? And Pir (Saint) Abdu-Samad was saying that this girl belongs to a lucky star. So whichever house she enters, she will turn it into a heaven. I thank God a million times that my sister conceded to my request, and you are asking me to wait and not arrange the marriage. Just think, would her father like to wait for your promotion and then marry his daughter when silver starts shining on his daughter's head?"

Hameed was about to say something when his father entered the room panting, and asked his wife as to what the quarrel was about? When he was told, he said "Dear Hameed, I only want to say one thing and that is that my sickness has become so advanced that I do not know how long I have to live. My only and last wish is to see you married before I die. After this I shall be able to die in peace. Won't you fulfil this last wish of your old and ailing father?"

Hameed wanted to say something but his father roared in anger and said, "I want to say it for the last time and this is my order. I do not want to say anything more."

## **Obedience to Parents**

Meanwhile the call to prayers was heard and Hameed went to say his prayers. It was a strange coincidence that, that day, the priest before delivering the sermon touched upon the problem of obedience to parents. He advised that according to Islamic law Sharia "It is your duty to obey your parents. Parents' status is equal to God's status. God never forgives a person who disobeys his parents. He goes straight to hell". Then he related how modern education had made today's youth rebellious and how they did not obey their parents or respect the elders.

Hameed was listening to all this and was perplexed. He realized that circumstances demanded that he should not marry. His situation, knowledge, discretion and experience all favoured this decision. He could see all the disadvantages of this untimely marriage. One by one, which tallied like two and two making four. But on the other hand he was being told that obedience to parents was a divine duty. You should never raise your voice against their decision. Just accept it without reservations. If you do not do it then you would be committing a crime against God. Since childhood he had a strong religious hold on him, and "Gods' will" superseded the demand of the time. After saying his prayers he repented and asked for God's forgiveness for his mistake. He went straight home from the mosque and respectfully asked for his father's forgiveness. "I was causing you depression. I would not mind obeying you in the least. Do whatever you want to do. I shall remain your obedient son".

Mother's eyes gleamed with happiness. She got up and hugged her son, blessed him and showered all the endearments on him. This is how this problem was decided.

## **The Quranic Injunction About Parents**

Just think Tahira! Could God order that you not use your mind or not utilize your faculties? Close your eyes to any profit or loss, and whatever your old parents ask you to do, you just obey them blindly?

You would say that whatever I am saying sounds good, but what should I say about this obedience to parents being a divine injunction?

But you would be surprised when I shall let you know that obedience to parents is not a divine injunction. The only Quranic injunction for parents is to look after them well since they have become old and deserve your care and love. You would say that it is an established fact that obedience to parents is our religious duty, and no one differs on this.

I would say there are so many wrong notions which have become established with the passage of time. If I prepare a list of all those beliefs which are considered as obligations by our traditional religion, and which in fact are not, and put them in front of you, you would feel dizzy. Just ponder how a notion becomes an established fact. Any notion which is handed down for two or three generations becomes an established fact. The criterion for right or wrong is the Quran. If the Quran says that something is right, then it is right even if nobody agrees to it. Whatever the Quran considers wrong is wrong, no matter if the whole world thinks contrary to it. You will also say that the duty to obey your parents is not only considered obligatory by Muslims, but every religion and every ethical code in the world considers it as an established obligation.

And I will say that one reason of the Quran being revealed by God, is that the Quran does not care what the world believes in. It calls right only that which in actual fact is right. If the Quran had been authored by a human being, then it would have included all the notions, which the world considers obligatory. But it did not come to follow the world; it came to make the world follow it. So it does not care whether it abrogates the set beliefs and ideas which have gained the status of set obligations by the religions of the world, because their own divine laws have not been preserved in their original shape. It is the aim of the Quran to present the facts and it has done so. Take this question of obedience to your parents. It is admitted by all the religions of the world as a set obligation. But the Quran says, if We grant long life to any person, We cause him to be reversed in nature (36:68), and that in old age one does tend to become senile. This is a useless part of one's age. The Quran says, some are sent back to the feeblest old age, so that they know nothing after having known (22:5).

## **The Quran and Other Religions**

These are those realities which can neither be denied by any religion of the world nor by any code of ethics. In spite of this they all say that a young man whom God has bestowed with knowledge and discretion; with the will to decide; has been endowed with strong nerves and faculties; and who has a sound and fresh head and heart, he should be bound by the decisions of those who have become superannuated with rusty knowledge. Their nerves and faculties have been frayed; their heads and hearts have become subservient to their emotions; they cannot comprehend the demands of the present times which are raising this young man in the race of this world; and they are lagging fifty years behind. These types of orders can only come from those codes of ethics which have been made by the old generation who want their younger folk to obey them. But Quran's code of life has been sent by God, it can never issue such commandments. Maharaja Ram Chander (a Hindu Ruler) could be considered the initiator of such a code of conduct (or man-made religion). He considered it his duty to obey even that order of his father, which even the father thought to be wrong, and Maharaja was forced to promulgate it. But Quran's hero is Abraham who openly denounced his father's beliefs and practices and refused to follow them. Quran says, There is for you an excellent example in Abraham (to follow) (60:4). But do not think the Quran is teaching you to rebel. It teaches you to obey. But obey whom? God's laws only!

## **Nature of Obedience**

For this reason alone, where on one hand Abraham is declared a hero of Islam, on the other hand Ismail his son, too, is being considered the same kind of hero for surrendering his neck to his father's knife. Why did he do so? Not because he obeyed his father but because he thought that it was God's

command! That was why he said, O my father, do as thou art commanded (37:102).

The fact of the matter is that it was not a command from God, as it was misunderstood! Therefore according to the Quran, total obedience is for God's laws alone and not of parents or anybody else. The Quran teaches that until a child reaches adulthood, the decision making on his behalf and looking after him is the responsibility of his parents or guardians. Therefore, he should not decide things for himself. He should follow his elders' decisions. But when he comes of age and becomes knowledgeable, then he should take decisions in the light of Divine laws himself. Therefore, for a knowledgeable young person, total obedience to his parents is out of the question. It is a blessing that mankind on the whole has not adhered to this code of ethics i.e. obedience to parents (and was not feasible either). Otherwise, if whole of mankind had followed it, then the world would have been stuck at the same place where it was at the beginning. There would have been no progress in any sphere of life, because if the present had been bound by the previous generation's decisions, how would it have advanced? The old generation considers its past as the best period of mankind, and grinds its teeth if ever anybody digresses an inch this way or that way. This is the reason why every aged person's nostalgia makes him cry. He belittles the modern time. His times look so rosy to him that he curses the present. The universe is rising upwards and not downwards; it is taking its strides forwards and not backwards.

Anyway my dear, this is the decision of the Quran about a concept that you had been thinking as an accepted reality. Now, I hope you understood how Hameed had been put upon a wrong track by the ignorance of that priest addressing the gathering in the mosque.

Anyhow this was how Hameed got married to Rasheeda. The first one or two months were glossy, but after this the bitterness of having taken a wrong step started surfacing its ugly head.

## **Mother-in-law Problem**

In human society the mother-in-law problem is so deep rooted and complicated, that the human mind has yet to solve it. Whether in the East or West, the mother-in-law problem is present everywhere. In the East, since a wife is the weaker vessel, it is always the mother-in-law pestering the daughter-in-law. But in the West, where women are dominant, the poor son-in-law considers his mother-in-law a demon. Sometimes it happens, without doubt, that you get a mother-in-law even more loving than your own mother, but this is one of those exceptions that do not prove the rule. Generally it happens as I have mentioned above. As far as I have pondered the mother-in-law problem is more psychological than social or economic. The way a mother has brought up her son, she considers him her sole 'property'; and she considers all rights reserved in her favour. She just does not want to share his love and attention. A mother nurtures all these sentiments unconsciously until her son comes of age and she starts thinking of marrying him. At that time, it does not occur to her that she herself is bringing home somebody who would become more absorbing for her son than herself (the mother). She thinks that she is getting a wife for her son and since her son is her sole property, therefore whatever would belong to him, would automatically belong to her. The only status that she gives to the newcomer is that of a vehicle to provide her with grandsons and grand-daughters. She is so absorbed in doing all this that she does not realize she is bringing in a share-holder. But after she brings the daughter-in-law home, it suddenly dawns upon her that her son is no longer under her thumb. Since the cause of all this is daughter-in-law, the mother takes her as a person who has robbed her of her dearest possession. And she is then bent upon to take revenge for her loss. Her son cannot judge this psychological change of his mother and neither can the daughter-in-law (since it does not occur to them that they, have snatched something from her). So they keep looking for the reasons for the mother's annoyance elsewhere. And the situation keeps deteriorating for everybody. Since unlike the mother, a father does not have this kind of notions in his mind, so the coming of a daughter-in-law does not perplex him. If ever he has complaints, they are of a different sort.

Some people think since every mother-in-law treats her daughter-in-law in a similar manner, then

when after some time, the daughter-in-law becomes a mother-in-law herself, she takes out all the excesses done to her by her mother-in-law, upon her own daughter-in-law; and this keeps going on and on.

Anyway whatever the reason, the fact is that the hell we witness in ninety-nine percent homes of our society, its basic reason is that the boy's mother does not prepare herself mentally for this new mode of life. Consequently she herself is in hell and she makes the newly weds' life a hell, too. And no one knows why this is happening and what its remedy is. You must have noticed Tahira, when the friction in such homes is analysed, there is nothing to it. In fact there is no issue at all. The real issue is what I have mentioned above, but neither the mother nor the son seems to be knowing this consciously, and neither does the poor newcomer. That is why such friction is considered incurable by us; and we, too, accept it as inevitable. But dear Tahira, all this is because of our ignorance.

## **Separate House for the Newly Weds**

Tahira there is only one remedy and this is that before the mother proposes, she should understand that her son is beginning a new life in which his love and attention will be transferred towards his wife. There is only goodwill left for the mother. If she understands this, then it is practical that the boy should be separated to lead his own life. He should be responsible for spending his own life and there should be no interference. You will see that in this way the son will look after his mother and the daughter-in-law will respect her, too. If their financial condition does not admit the burden of two separate households, then the boy should not be married off till he is capable of shouldering the responsibility of a separate household. Otherwise there is no way to save our homes from the fire of this hell.

In Hameed's case, his mother had financial difficulties besides psychological problems which were apprehending him at the very start. The collective effect of marriage loans, increasing expenses at home, and the father's chronic illness took their toll, and the mother-in-law started taking it out on poor Rasheeda. The same Rasheeda who before marriage used to be praised so much as understanding, discreet, quiet, virtuous and obedient, was now somebody in whom the mother-in-law was picking holes all the time. She became an ill-omen, and somebody who could not do any thing good. "Her stepping into this house has robbed our house of prosperity. With the same income, the house used to be flourishing, but now it looks God forsaken. She has no manners, she cannot cook and she cannot look after the house. Did her mother think that her daughter would never have to go to her in-laws' house, that she did not train her for it. The spoilt brat!

## **The Tussle**

The minute Hameed used to go out of the house in the morning, the mother-in-law would start hurling such brick-bats of sarcasm till the evening. Rasheeda tried her utmost to please her mother-in-law, but all in vain. Her mother-in-law was hell-bent on pulling her down. Rasheeda used to bear all this stoically. She did not even mention it to Hameed. When the mother-in-law noticed that Hameed was not checking his wife, she started complaining about Rasheeda to Hameed. This way the hell that Rasheeda was going through engulfed Hameed, too. As if financial constraints were not enough for him, he was plunged into a new predicament. This entanglement was quite queer. He was a discreet boy who could judge a situation and reach a conclusion. He could see that Rasheeda was absolutely innocent and that his mother was entirely to be blamed. But because of deep rooted concept of respect and grandeur of his parents and the sermons he had heard about obeying them, he could not dare to accuse his mother, and take sides with his wife. All this was causing a tremendous psychological turmoil for him, but he could not avoid it. His wife's exploitation, parents' obedience and his own helplessness were feelings which were gnawing at his heart. He knew the only solution to this predicament was to separate from his parents, but his financial helplessness was making it impossible. When once or twice he expressed such a desire, his mother beat her own head and threatened him with committing suicide by jumping into a well, if ever he thought of separating from

her. All these problems started telling upon Hameed's health. It was affecting Rasheeda more than Hameed. She was bearing the yoke herself but when she saw that her husband, too, was being affected, this was more than she could bear. She was being corroded inwardly and was drying up. In the same state of health, she gave birth to her first child. It is so obvious that if a child's mother's health is deteriorating, the child would bring some diseases (or susceptibilities to them) along with him. Rasheeda was not keeping well and, on top of this, the poverty did not allow her to care for the child. It was probable that Hameed's mother would have borrowed some money for the caring of her son's first male child, but woe betide, it was a daughter. The 'bad news' distorted her vision and she called the child her "ill-omened daughter-in-law's ill-omened daughter". Who would have looked after her? She survived somehow for three months, and then passed away leaving an indelible mark on her mother to mourn.

## Conclusion

After this, Rasheeda's condition deteriorated day by day. She contracted tuberculosis. The division of the sub-continent had made his parents so poor that they could not afford her treatment and one day, she finally gave up the struggle.

Tahira, this is the heart-rending story of your childhood friend. It is not just her story, it is the story of your society. We do not know how many Rasheedas' are scarified everyday. Firstly we do not know the inner story of a house and secondly if we do get to know, then it is only that so and so's daughter, or so and so's daughter-in-law died today. Other than that, nobody would know how she died.

## The Advice

One never knows Tahira, that when your son Javed grows up and you will be worrying about his marriage, whether I would be there or not. But you must remember my two or three points. If you act upon them you will be happy and so would Javed and his wife. Firstly, think of marrying Javed when he is fully financially capable of shouldering his responsibilities. If ever, God forbid, he has to help his parents financially, he should be able to do so easily.

Secondly, keep fully in mind that after his marriage he would be attending mostly to his wife and not you. You should only expect good-will from him.

Right after marriage, arrange for their living separately and you should interfere the least. Whatever interference you feel is necessary, should be given as a suggestion. And if they reject that suggestion, do not mind.

After this you will see how Javed respects you and how you are revered by your daughter-in-law.

I am writing all this and laughing inwardly. I know today you like what I say and adhere to each and every word of it by saying that, "that is how it should be", because you are the daughter-in-law and somebody else is your mother-in-law; but you may not remember a thing about what I have said when you are the mother-in-law and somebody else is your daughter-in-law.

Life is a queer cycle! But we have made it like this! The creator of the world did not make it for us. He creates all humans the same, we make mothers-in-law and daughters-in-law. After this, the mother-in-law and the daughter-in-law remain and humanity leaves them.

But come what may, God's laws keep humanity intact; they never let it decay. Rather they keep on raising it higher and higher. Hence whether you are a mother-in-law or a daughter-in-law, do not forget the humanity in you or the other person. In God's sight all humans are worthy of respect. The Quran says: Verily, We have honoured the sons of Adam..... (17:70). A person who keeps this truth always in mind, is a Muslim.

My blessings for Javed and God be with you!

**Parwez**

**January 8, 1954**

## [Home](#) **Child's Upbringing**

### *Eight Letter to Tahira*

Tahira you are so naive. You are surprised over Saeeda who is about to be twenty and still talks like child. This means that you think that a child's mind becomes mature as his or her body grows with age. This notion is absolutely wrong and against the facts. If the mind, too, matures automatically like the body then our society would be of a different (nature) altogether. All the troubles that you see in the world are mostly due to the people whose bodies have matured, but their minds are still immature. The world would still be safe if with the mind, the body, too, remains like that of a child, because if a child's mind is immature, then his bodily strength and its potential of wielding power is quite limited, too. He then cannot cause much destruction and bloodshed. But just think, if a body has the strength of a young man and we, considering him to be an adult, give all the responsibilities in his care although mentally he is immature, then what would the result be?

### **Body and Mind**

The result would be the same which you saw in the movie "Frankenstein": The body of a giant and the brain of a mad man, with the difference that in this case everybody considered that he was really mad. But nobody considered a young man with an immature mind, as mad. He is considered to be a fully conscious and a rational person. With this thought in mind he is given important responsibilities. Afterwards, when he behaves like a child, we get upset. This condition is the first spark that disturbs our peace of mind and tranquillity. This then leads to difference of opinion, which develops into conflicts and conflict develops into strife. That child with a mature body neither wants to change his position, nor does he want to change his attitude. In fact, changing his attitude is something he cannot do. If we have given him powers which we cannot easily withdraw, then our helplessness poisons our whole system. We sulk and cannot do anything about it. But if we, too, have equal power, a head-on collision occurs, which then makes our society a hell. Consequently, this state of affairs turns itself into a world war. These day to day conflicts, feuds, riots and acts of barbarism, what else are they other than the outcome of the same mature body having an immature mind. If a child keeps on getting proper food then his body develops on its own, but we forget that the mind does not automatically develop along with the body. A lot of hard work is needed to nurture a mind. It requires special attention towards the education of the child. Dear Tahira, this is the reason why I keep on telling this to you, although sometimes I do feel that you may be minding my repetition.

### **Education of the Child**

But this is of such importance, that I will keep on repeating that you do a lot to look after Javed's bodily needs, (May God keep him safe from all evil!) but you do not do much to train his mind. At the most you will say, "I do not let him play with bad-mannered children". This is true, he would be saved from developing bad habits. But do you believe that if a child does not get bad habits, he instinctively develops good habits? You may not admit it, but I think you believe that if a child is being kept away from bad habits then the development of his head and heart would take place quite "instinctively". And that way he would become the embodiment of all the good habits in the world. This is a wrong notion. I have written in detail about "instinct" in one of the letters to Saleem, (ref. Parwez, G.A. "letters to Saleem", 17th letter). Perhaps you have read that letter. Since it was somewhat philosophical, you might not have understood it fully. Let me make you understand the same in another way. You have observed other children, but Javed's each and every antic must be fixed and vivid in your mind. Just think over the fact that when (after his birth) he was still oblivious of the world around him, what was his 'nature'? He was an absolute "goof" (ignorant of everything)?

### **Child's Nature!**

He had as much knowledge as, for example, a goat's kid has. It sucks milk when hungry and then goes off to sleep. It starts bleating if the milk is delayed. Even one stage forward, when the child starts flailing his arms and legs, he still falls short of knowledge, when compared to a kid. A kid would die of hunger but would not touch a heap of green chilies lying nearby. But a child would put a chilly in his mouth if he could lay his hand upon it, or for that matter anything that he could get. A piece of rock salt, or earth, or ashes, or lime, or coal, you name it and he will put it in his mouth. Do you remember your son swallowing that coin? What a predicament we all were in, including he himself. Have you ever seen a kid swallowing a coin? Our worries increase when the child becomes a toddler. He will touch fire, and if you save him from there, then he will plunge into the water tub. It was just that God wanted him to live and be a source of pleasure to us. However, Rani saw him otherwise.....(My daughter, I do not want to repeat the bygone. May God save everybody from unheard of troubles).

A step ahead: when he learns to walk and run, he runs into trouble all the more. He would either himself fall of the terrace or shove his friend off. Whatever he lays his hands upon, he throws; like breaking this saucer or that cup. The moment he sees anything in somebody's hand, he attempts to snatch it. If that person does not want to part with it, then he is in for a bite with from the child's teeth or scratches from his nails. That sweepers's son could barely save his eye. Destroying, snatching, beating, slapping, is a child's 'nature' which he does not learn from anybody. It oozes out of him by itself.

Psychologically a child is quite jealous. You often write in your letters that poor little Baby is quite often slapped by Javed. It is the same emotion of jealousy at work. Before the baby girl was born, Javed was the sole recipient of everybody's love. There was nobody sharing it. With the arrival of the new baby, he had to share his domain. Now he wants to expel the poor girl from her limelight. A child wants to be the sole centre of everybody's attention. He wants to remain 'self-centered'. Now you will see that when the little girl grows up, she would generally remain unwell. Do you know why such a thing should happen? She would not be able to compete with Javed in strength, therefore she will remain weak and sick to get everybody's attention. The same emotion of being 'self-centered' manifests itself. This is dear Tahira, the pattern of a human child which has been sheltered from surrounding influences and has been left to grow by itself. You say that you are very careful not to let Javed play with ill-mannered children so that he may not pick bad habits. I say, even if you bring up your child in a 'thermos' (flask), he would still have those habits I have mentioned above. Are these any less bad-habits? Now just think. If these children are saved (according to you) from bad habits and they grow up with the above mentioned mentality what kind of young men would they make for our society? I do not think any other word than "criminal" fits this description. Dear daughter, these are the people who generally make up our society. Those adults (men and women) whose bodies have matured with age but whose mentality (or mind) is like children. Out of these a few grab the chair to power, some grace the religious cushions, some meddle with commerce, some dominate the industrial centres, some become the law formulators, some become the admirers of posterity and the world starts taking them as heroes and leaders. Whereas generally they are the same: with an adult body and an immature mind. An adult body with a mature mind is a rarity.

You will also say that we do not leave our children as they are. We educate them. But just think what kind of education we give them. It is generally taken for granted that a child's education begins when we send him to school. But this is wrong. A child has learnt many things by that age. Do you notice that Javed speaks a language which you speak at home and the neighbour's child speaks the language of his home. You have never made Javed sit with a book and table to learn Urdu. He has learned your Urdu without being taught. Do you believe that when he was quietly picking up the Urdu language, he was not learning anything else? He was in fact subtly learning all the things happening at your home day and night. This was the education which he had acquired before going to school; and the main portion of this education consisted of what you call ethics and beliefs.

Animals do not have moral laws. Humans are the only ones who have this distinction. But just think Tahira, what is the basis of this significant distinction? Of course, it is this education which is subtly

absorbed by the child, (as I have written to you in an earlier letter of mine). A Jain child would vomit even to think of meat, while a Muslim child sucks at a bone like his mother's milk. A Hindu shudders to think of beef, but a Muslim thinks that the tastiest 'kababs' are made with beef. People consider it a sin even to kill an ant in our houses, but a thug would not think much of murdering a human. This is the basic education which a child acquires before he goes to school.

What kind of education do these schools impart? Before you think about it, bring to your mind your earlier letter in which you had written that although you take great care of Javed's food, he is not getting the corresponding strength and vigour. I had told you that you give him everything he wants to eat, but do you ever care whether he digests and absorbs it or not. If the food is not absorbed by the body then it could be harmful rather than beneficial. The same is true of our education, too. Our educational system renders information to the children but disregards the fact whether it can become a part of their character or not. Character building is not done by our educational system. It only renders information. Therefore, our young people tend to present a personality which consists of an able body, grown-up according to age, with a child's mind and carrying a whole load of information. Now it is obvious how a young man with this mentality uses his power and wealth in the same way he would use his stored information which has been loaded on to him in schools and colleges. Now upon analysing this young man's personality what you will find is as follows: (i) Age-wise, by our estimate, a mature person, ready to shoulder all kinds of responsibilities. (ii) Mind-wise, like a child who just does not know what a responsibility is (iii) Education-wise, like a porter at a station who carries a lot of load but owns nothing of it (iv) Beliefs and concepts which he has unconsciously acquired at home, but which does not understand and cannot defend by reason or argument.

Such concepts are harmful, instead of being useful. This reason is that these concepts neither come out of the depth of heart, nor grow in a rational mind. He remains unconsciously faithful to them, and whenever he is confronted with the realities of life or arguments that do not tally with them, he at once takes off his mask and abhors them or revolts against them. If he is not courageous enough to show his revolt openly then he becomes bigoted. His heart turns into a permanent beat of hypocrisy, whose destructive consequences can be quite far reaching.

## **Mother's Duties**

Tahira, I hope now you understand what responsibilities the mother of a child has to shoulder. I doubt if those mothers who get a tin of powdered milk for his food; hire an uncouth hand to look after; and send him to a nursery school for education, would be able to understand these responsibilities. As for themselves, they whisk off to the clubs, on the plea that they come to kill their unoccupied time. Or else (in line with the latest mood), enroll themselves as a member of some social welfare society and start lecturing about the moral degradation of the nation. A dutiful mother of even one child has so much to do about her child's caring, training and education that she just cannot spare anytime to attend to anything else. When the Quran enjoined that according to natural division of labour bread-winning is the responsibility of the man, and it is his duty to ensure that all his wife's needs are fulfilled, it did not mean that the woman was reduced into a handicapped person or a financial slave of the man. It said this because it knew that a conscientious mother would have no time to earn her bread. Therefore, my daughter, you have to watch it daily that his mind and body develop at the same pace. If it is not happening this way, then be assured that when he grows up he would be a problem for himself and a terror to the society. Remember, a human child has countless potentialities and there is no limit for their fulfillment. If we keep on nourishing them then they shall keep on developing throughout the life. Just imagine, if a child's potential capabilities remain suppressed, who knows what priceless gems society is deprived of.

## **Immature Mind**

Now you will ask, how do we know that so and so man (or woman) has an immature mind? It is not very difficult to find out:

1. When you see somebody solving a problem like children, then surmise that he has a child's mind in an adult body. If you look at it from this angle, you will find that men and women whom you consider adults are in fact children. They are the same "children" who cause a large number of social problems in the society.
2. If you see a man or woman who feels quite satisfied that at a certain age he or she has required enough knowledge and does not need any more, then, too, surmise that mentally that person is child. A child, at every stage, considers his knowledge complete.
3. A child is unaware of law and does not want to be restricted. 'Law' does not mean the law of a court. This law defines that every human act has a certain consequence. In English they call it "what follows what". In the terminology of the Quran it is called the law of retribution. In this world it is the method to arrive at true conclusions. It is generally known as the scientific method. A child does not know this method. He does not know what the consequences of his action would be. That is why there is no logical sequence in his discussions and no organization in his actions. If you observe the same phenomenon in an adult then surmise that he has (involuntarily) grown up chronologically age wise, but mentally he is far behind.
4. Human beings are defined as rational animals. Rational means one having ratio, and ratio means correct proportion and balance. Therefore, human quality should be that anything you say or do, should carry correct proportion and have balance. A child has no notion of proportion or balance. Hence whenever you see a man or woman whose life does not express proportion and balance, this person would mentally be a child.
5. You must have observed when you talk to some people, that after listening carefully for two or three minutes, they will be fed up and start looking here and there. They would be wishing for the topic to end and would want another interesting one to start. It is not that the subject does not hold interest for them after two or three minutes, or that it is not beneficial to them. The subject was just as interesting and beneficial to them, but is just that their span of attention is so short that they cannot concentrate on anything for long. You will watch that they never finish any work. Today they start something and get so absorbed in it that onlookers would think that they would even miss a meal to finish it. But after two or three days, it is observed that they have left that work unfinished and are pursuing something else. They spend their whole life without success and without achieving anything. If you see their varied occupations, some here, some there, one half-done, another three quarters done, but none complete. Sometimes they have fine ability and you can see their special skill in their work, but their disposition is such that they cannot complete any programme.

Be quite sure that this aged person is "an aged minor". Absolutely like a child, because children cannot concentrate on one thing for long. One moment they are doing one thing, next they are indulging in something else. One minute they are playing one game, after sometime, another. If along with the body the mind does not mature, he will manifest this trend all his life.

Here do understand one more thing. It is not necessary that all of a person's mental faculties would have remained immature. It is possible that one of his faculties may have become matured while another one may still be immature. This type of people are all the more difficult to handle. On seeing their mature faculty people liken them for mature persons but when their immaturity is revealed in other aspects of life, then one is at one's wits' end as to what to say or take them for.

6. You must have seen children who cry themselves hoarse when their clay toy-horses break, but if somebody brings a balloon for them, they start jumping with joy. Their measures of happiness and sadness are quite small. It is the same with those who are immature in mind. Anything, however slight, that goes against them or they imagine to be so, is enough to make them feel the sky has fallen. They are gloomy themselves and make others sad, too. The slightest pretext is enough to bring them to tears. On the other hand the smallest good news makes them jubilant. If you do not behave like them then they accuse you of being jealous.
7. Children are known for their imbalance when taking revenge. If they become cross with

anybody, they attack with full force. They do not realize the proportion between the crime and punishment. To them punishment means just satisfying their feelings of revenge, and that is all. The same is the case of those elders with immature minds. They do not have a sense of justice (that is the ratio between crime and punishment). This is generally known as 'Regal Disposition'. When they wield power, then whoever differs from them even slightly they would crush that person with all their might. They do not do justice, they just take their revenge. They feel very happy and proud over the discomfiture of their opponent, just like how a child feels triumphant when he has pushed his adversary away.

8. Another childish trait is like that a child for whom, even if has ten toys but sees another child having something that he does not have, having the ten toys would be of no satisfaction. He would either want to possess it, or to get another one just like that. The elders with immature minds also display the same behaviour. They are never satisfied with what they possess and are always hankering after those things which they do not have, regardless of whether they need them or not. Since in our present times we have a majority of such "minor elders", the businessmen trading with them take advantage of this childishness. Through advertisements these "children" are being told that they do not have this or that. That is how the bazaar remains humming, due mostly to them. Today very few things are bought because they are needed. Most of the things bought are these about which advertisements give you a feeling that you 'don't have this or you do not have that' You Tahira, bring to your mind the homes of your friends and see how many things they have which they have never used even once. These things remain lying in their boxes and drawers. Just like how Javed keeps his multicoloured glasses and ceramic pieces, a rusty iron bar, a cap's tassel, an empty cigarette pack, a peacock feather, slate, pencil, a piece of crayon, scraps of paper and a dried sunflower in an empty shoe box; so carefully and then he forgets all about where he might have kept them. And then starts collecting his "precious property" all over again!

The above mentioned qualities precisely highlight an immature mind. Those who do not grow mentally, with age, retain these qualities. And as I have written before, this phenomenon makes life difficult for both, him and the society. But the hardest part is to bring about a change when you are grown up, because sub-consciously we derive pleasure from this irresponsible attitude.

## **A Child's Training-ground**

That is why we call our childhood the best part of our life and keep nursing a wish in our hearts for the recurring of those lovely days. Therefore, a person can be best trained in his childhood, and the best training ground is the home of the child. Homes that care for children's training from this viewpoint produce confident, responsible, sympathetic, loving, sacrificing, courageous and generous children. In those homes that do not impart good training the child is made to depend upon others, which results in his lack of confidence. Alternately he becomes so terrified due to frequent scolding that he cannot develop courage and truthfulness. In other places, if he is the apple of his mother's eye, then he is deprived of his masculinity, or if he is the father's pet, then he cannot comprehend the finer points of life. Sometimes uncertainties and fear of the loss of father's job or the vacating of a house, makes him a slave of economics right from childhood. In other cases all his demands are catered to, and he has been made to think that fulfillment of his material needs is the only aim of life. Some homes tell the child that his father and his home are the best, thus making him prejudiced against colour, creed and country. In other places he is told that nothing in the world is good, so he becomes pessimistic and despairing about the future. At times too many instructions too often kill his initiative and he behaves like a machine. Some leave the child absolutely free, so he is unable to respect the law. At times unwholesome surroundings can kill his fine sentiments for appreciating beauty. Sometimes he is made aware, through such remarks, that playing with other children would soil his clothes, and he comes to hate others and starts indulging in self-praise. At other times he is told not "to criticize or censor the ancestors, it would be wrong". This turns him into a dumb, driven sheep. At times, an instruction like, "whenever, you have to decide about problems, just consult your heart", is tantamount to throwing permanent values, revelation and solid principles to the winds.

You must have seen from this Tahira, that a house plays such an important role in moulding the character of people. The kind of nation you will be is determined by the kind of homes you have had. All this would make you understand what the responsibilities of a mother are. In Iqbal's words, "She builds the character of nations". That is why the word Ummah in Arabic has been derived from Um which means mother. At birth a child is absolutely raw material; the mother moulds him by giving knowledge. He is dumb; the mother makes him talk, gives him language (mother tongue). He is quite irresponsible; the mother makes him learn to be responsible. He is quite selfish; the mother persuades him to love his brothers and sisters, and be sympathetic to others. He sees everything in parts; the mother shows him to view the whole. The child is only like moulding clay at birth, and a mother can mould him anyway she wants.

This, my dear girl, are your responsibilities. These are responsibilities which you have been asked to shoulder by humanity. May God give you strength to be able to fulfil these responsibilities successfully, so that you should be able to say it proudly that you have added somebody to the teeming millions of the world of whom humanity would be proud!

It is impossible to achieve this without the help of the Quranic guidance, because humanity could only be achieved within its framework.

**Parwez**  
**December 1954**

## [Home](#) **Regarding Veil**

### *Ninth Letter to Tahira*

Tahira you were right when you said, according to (2:228): the responsibilities of women correspond to their rights. Unfortunately, this verse has been reduced to recitation only. In reality, what is happening is that all rights belong to the men, and all responsibilities have been assigned to women; so much so that honourable lie is demanded of women only and not of men. If ever a rumour about a girl spreads, she is branded for life and no respectable family would accept her. However, when these same respectable families start talking the marriage of their son, then this is generally how the boy's mother would complain to his father. "How long will you let this boy loiter. I had been telling you that all is not well. He is becoming a loafer and has started keeping bad company; but you do not listen to me. Now he has started staying out late and sowing his wild oats. Do get him settled somewhere; after all how long will you keep on merely thinking about it"?

This is to say that if a boy sows his wild oats, it is not counted as being a serious problem, but any slight suspicion or misunderstanding about a girl is enough to wreck her life. This is her pre-marriage vulnerability. What about after her marriage? If a husband learns that his wife had stepped out of the house without his permission, even if she might have gone to visit her parents, this could be considered a crime serious enough for her to qualify for a divorce, or to earn a bad reputation for herself. On the other hand if a man becomes openly wayward, his name does not get tarnished. Therefore, in a society where purity is demanded of women only, and men are exempted, it is useless to talk about women's rights and privileges or responsibilities, which are the attributes of the equality demanded by the Quran.

### **Quranic Demands**

According to the Quran the purity of body and soul, which is the hallmark of humans, is equally demanded from both men and women. If keeping herself chaste is the responsibility of the woman, then she has the right to demand this from the men as well. Just as it is incumbent on the woman to keep herself chaste (24:31), it has also been made obligatory for men to keep themselves chaste (24:30). In fact men have been addressed first and women afterwards. When the Quran tells a woman to be chaste, in the same manner it asks men to be unsullied (33:35). Just as a lapse in this respect makes a woman a criminal, so does it make the man a criminal. Even their punishment is same: Whip each man or woman sex offender with hundred lashes (24:2). I do hope that you now understand that Quranic society demands both men and women to be chaste, as well as: the responsibilities of women correspond to their rights (2:228), which is the practice of women's equal rights with equal responsibilities.

### **Problem of Veil**

Now comes your main query. I am not very surprised at the query, rather why you were late in making it. Why didn't you ask about it in your first letter? Now a days there is no other more important question for women, than that of the veil. Almost ninety per cent of all the inquiries that I receive from women are about the veil. Leaving aside the exceptions, they do not ask what the Quran says about it, but rather they want to know how their adopted style can be justified through the Quran and explained as confirming to Islam. But I know that this is not the motive of your inquiry. I do not know at which blessed moment our late brother proposed your name as Tahira but you have certainly been amply bestowed with the purity of head and heart. The nation can never feel proud enough of daughters like you. In fact people can never envy enough the families that bring forth such leading lights, which are like an alcove not lit by a lamp, but which is bright, sparkling and soothed by the early morning light. A lamp that has been put in a crystal clear glass chandelier remains safe from

outer influences. That chandelier looks like a star that is giving off streams of light (making the whole house shining bright) (24:35).

## House Imprisonment

First of all, Tahira do understand seclusion. House arrest is a punishment that Quran suggests for women who are inclined towards seduction. They need not have seduced anybody, but their actions may have been suggestive. Therefore, Surah An-Nisa says:

*The women whose antics are suggestive of seduction, and if there are four people who as witnesses can claim so, should be put under house arrest until they die, or until the law of God shows them a positive alternative (4:15).*

From this you should note that house arrest is a punishment for vagrant women. As such, our customary seclusion for women is not only against the tenets of the Quran but is a crime, since the illegal detention of innocent people is a crime against the law of the land, as well as of Islam.

It is said that women are not being detained in their houses against their will, and that they are doing so because of their disposition, and out of modesty and shyness. How self-deceptive this argument is! We bring up and train our daughters in such a way that, like a caged bird, they get used to these restrictions. Then we present this life style as what they are used to, and the nature of their disposition is advanced as argument to justify this imprisonment for life.

## A Secondary Problem

Incidentally, the above verse from Surah An-Nisa also reminds us of something else. Its mention would be of benefit. A few days ago a non-Muslim member of our legislative assembly objected to the Quranic system which specified the punishment for zina (sex out of wedlock) as hundred lashes. This made our Muslim members very embarrassed and crestfallen, so much so that it was within their power they would, God forbid, cross out the verse ordering such a "barbaric" punishment. Then they would triumphantly answer the objector that these orders belonged to older times, and that the new edition of the Quran which they have printed, does not contain any such barbaric order belonging to the dark ages. But this, these poor dears could not possibly do, and thus they countered by saying that the Quran has put the condition that four eye-witnesses should prove the crime. (That is, four witnesses who could testify the action had been performed). Since it is impossible to get four such eye-witnesses (because leaving illegal action alone, even legally nobody can perform such an act in the presence of other people), according to the Quranic code of law you cannot prove zina, and as such the people involved cannot be served such a barbaric punishment. Saying this must have made our Muslim members very happy, in that they had been able to save the Quran from such a great objection. Now who will tell these enemies of knowledge that in trying to save the Quran they had presented God, the law-maker, as a laughing stock of the world. Perhaps they are not to be blamed, as it is the translation which reads as such: That for the women who commit the crime of 'zina', their cases should have four witnesses and only then can this punishment is served. As I have written above, this verse is not for zina but for immodest behaviour, which can eventually lead to zina. Anyway, this was a digression; let us come back to the main topic.

We have seen that according to the Quran, keeping women confined inside their houses is a crime. Therefore such a seclusion can not be Quranic.

As discussed in my first letter, according to the Quran the division of labour applies to the duties of men and women in life. Man's duty is to earn the bread, and the woman's is to raise and train the children. It is thus obvious that a man's circle of activity would mostly be outside the house, while a woman's is inside. Going contrary to this generally tells of the improper division of duties. That is why we say of a useless and unemployed man, that he sits at home like women. This principle

implies the fact that a woman's station is generally at home, and that she should go out when she needs to. In the same way a man's activities are outside the house, and he comes home when the need demands. That is why it was enjoined upon women: Tell them that their station is in their home (33:33); so generally they should be staying at home. This verse, however, was revealed about the worthy wives of the Messenger of God(PBUH), and it has been said about them that they are not like ordinary women. Nevertheless the verse formulates the principle that the centre of a woman's duty is her home. It is a fact that home plays a vital role in human life. Home here does not mean a house of brick and mortar, or a kitchen. In fact it encompasses a pleasant atmosphere and peaceful surroundings which are conducive to the development of the finer sentiments and for the rearing and education of the coming generations. It should be a proper centre for training children, which is specifically under the charge of a woman. This is what is meant when we call a home a station. The above explanations highlight two things:

1. Keeping women confined in houses and forbidding them to go out is a punishment according to the Quran. It is not Quranic modesty.
2. A woman's station is her home.

Now the question arises as to the manner of her staying at home, and her mode of moving about outside the house. The Quran gives instructions for both situations, but before I state these Quranic guidelines I want to emphasize that purity of thought and deed is a must for both men and women. The cultivation of a sterling character is the most important pre-requisite for becoming a Momin. Carelessness to unsullied character not only spoils one's personal integrity, but is also detrimental to national culture and civilization. The mode of education professed by the Quran does not stop at assigning punishment for such crimes, but wants to eradicate the circumstances and reasons due to which these are committed. It does not wait for the thief to commit theft and then pounce upon him. Rather it wants to block and guard all those alleys and lanes which can influence the thief. To put it in another way, rather than killing the thief, it kills the 'mother' (the source), so that no thief is born. It has also adopted the same stance for the protection of chastity. It has assigned a punishment for zina and for the wrong accusation against innocent women, but along with this it suggests preventive ways and means.

Since the subject has come to the fore, I should explain it in more details. The customary standing on ceremony, or shyness, should not obstruct the way, because these formal man-made barriers tend to obscure the truth. There are many types of physical actions such as breathing, on which the very life depends. Breathing is not dependent upon your intentions, and you do not have to do anything consciously to satisfy it. Even when one is awake, sleeping, sitting, walking, or doing anything or thinking of something, breathing automatically continues. One need not determine it, or do something about it and stopping it needs some effort.

Another physical urge is that of eating and drinking. This, too, does not depend upon your thinking or determination. When there is nothing in the stomach, you feel hungry. As your hunger increases, it becomes the centre of your attention; but if you are deeply absorbed in your thoughts you forget your hunger. However, when its severity increases, it attracts your attention despite your being deep in thought. This urge makes itself felt, or becomes apparent, without any thought or intent.

The third urge is sexual. Unlike the urge to breathe or eat and drink, it does not awaken on its own. It has to be awakened by conscious thought and intention. If a person is absorbed in work and is quite unaware of his surroundings, his breathing would continue on its own. He will also feel hungry automatically. In the beginning he may not attend to his hunger, but after some time this urge will force him to respond. On the other hand, the sexual urge would never raise its head and draw attention if one is absorbed in work. The awakening of this urge depends upon thought and intention. To preserve the purity of character, the Quran does not let such instances happen where upon human thought and attention can excite this urge. This is that important point around which revolves the whole question of modesty. If unacquainted men and women behave in a manner which reverts them

to sexual urges, then such actions are worth stopping. If you can achieve a state in which such situations do not occur, then this is how the Quran wants your society to be.

After this discussion on the principle, let us now see how the Quran tackles it. First, let us consider life inside the home. The Quran stresses the sanctity of the home. Hence it orders:

*If you go to somebody's house, seek their permission to enter. When allowed greet them and wish them peace. If nobody responds from within, never step in. If they want to be excused, then come back immediately (24:27-28).*

Then the Quran says that you are being taught this social etiquette so that its observance would make you better human beings. In the same context it was said: If you have to borrow something, even if it be from the house of the Messenger of God(PBUH), then ask for it from behind a curtain (33:53). It was then said that this would be conducive to unsullied sentiments between you and the women inside the house.

Along with the above, it is also instructed that if an unknown man calls from outside, the women within should not remain quiet like dumb people. They should respond in a proper way but not in an enticing voice that would bring out the worst in a man. It should not be out of context either. All what should be done is essential and proper talk which should fulfil the need of the moment, and not be seductive and enticingly attractive (33:32). This should be followed not only in talk but in their style of walking, too.

A Persian couplet reads: Love is not awoken by talk only, sometimes this fire also gets kindled by a walk. Therefore:

*While walking on the floor you should not strike your feet in a manner that the jingle of your ornaments can attract the attention of the opposite sex (24:32).*

Do you see, Tahira, how the Quran asks you to adopt a manner which does not direct a person's thoughts towards sex. All this refers to men outside the house; now let us turn to the inside of homes. In this context, you should know that the Quran does allow all kinds of make-up and adornment. According to it this adornment is for enhancing beauty in human life. Therefore no one has a right to ban them.

## Display of Adornment

The display of adornment, however, is allowed in front of a husband only, or in front of those whose thoughts would not turn towards sex by it. Therefore it was ordered:

*Do not display your adornment except in front of your husbands, your fathers; your fathers-in-law, your sons, your husband's sons, your brothers and their sons, your sister's sons, your male, female servants who were still working inside the house, in front of the old men-servants who are no longer interested in sex, and those children who are not yet aware of sex (24:31).*

These instructions are given so that you can lead a prosperous and successful life, and in which the positive efforts of your society can bear fruit. The Quran is so particular that instructions about servants and children are also given:

*When they want to come to your room before you rise in the morning, or when you are resting, or at night, they should get your permission (24:58).*

In this context you should keep in mind that verse (24:31) instructs you not to reveal your adornment even in front of women whom you do not know, as they, too, could cause some kind of mishaps.

## Outside House

Now let us step outside the house. As written earlier, keeping women confined within the four walls of the house is a punishment. As such, there is not harm in going out when needed. When women go out, men are bound to be present and therefore, before saying anything to women the Quran addresses men and says: There are women walking about, so do not stare at them. Keep your eyes downcast (24:30). In Surah An-Noor the Quran says: Momin men should be asked to keep their gazes usually lowered when walking out, and to not let them become wild (24:30). This is a pre-requisite to remaining chaste. As you know, being chaste is the basic quality of a Momin . Just as eyes bring out the messages from within, they also carry the messages inwards, too. That is why they should be kept under check, as this would nourish the better strains in them. However, do tell them that this order is not to be observed mechanically, but one should be aware of the higher motives for which one has been asked to keep the eyes in check. Remember God fully knows what you do mechanically (24:30). After taking all these precautionary measures, women have been told that they could come out. But how? Tell Momin women to generally keep their eyes downcast, and not to let their eyes become immodest (24:30). This is how a society would remain chaste. Till here the rule is the same for men and women. But more was needed for women, hence the Quran directs: You do not display your adornments except those parts of the body that remain exposed inevitably. They should spread their head-gear on their chests (24:31). In another place it is said: They should gather their 'Jalbab' and keep it near them (33:59). Jalbab is a cloth that is worn over one's clothes when going out. It is thus obvious that whether you cover your chest with your head-gear, or whether you wear something over your clothes, there is no mention of hiding your face. If concealing the face had been necessary, then why were men directed to keep the eyes downcast? It may be objected, that when it is directed that 'Zeenat' be concealed, then as the face is the more prominent place of beauty, it should be hidden first. However, the Quran itself enjoins: Cover your adornments except those parts which remain open inevitably (24:30), and it then describes methods of covering which leave the face exposed. As such, hiding the face cannot be a Quranic tenet.

I would like to make it clear that the Quran has mentioned 'Khamar' and 'Jalbab' because these were prevalent among Arabs at that time. It is not necessary for us to wear the Jalbab and Khamar or similar coverings. The Quranic aim is to conceal your adornments when going out. For this purpose we can wear what we like. The cut and style of the dress is dictated by your social mode, which keeps on changing with time. The main purpose is to adhere to the Quranic goal of hiding your adornment.

## Showing off

The above was in answer to the question on how woman should go out. The Quran also explained the aim of the style of walk and talk? The purpose is this: Tell them that they should not exhibit their beauty and adornment around like it was being done in the dark ages (33:33). It shows that 'Tabarraaj' was indulged in during dark ages, and the Quran forbade it. Tabarraaj derives from 'burj' which means a tower; to raise something, or to surface, or to show off. Contrary to this, is "Haya" modesty, which means to shrink. Tabarraaj thus means showing off, and modesty implies of 'shrinking'. The Quran forbids showing off, and advises modesty. Therefore any style that highlights and shows off beauty, or any exhibitionism, is against the tenets of the Quran.

Also remember that whatever is plausible outside the house, is admissible inside, too, particularly with regard to unrelated men other than those which have been mentioned above in (24:31). Your adornment has to remain concealed. Women are not forbidden to sit with men inside the house, but the same conditions that apply for going out would apply here, too.

## Permission to see each other

Let us consider those necessary situations in which men and women are not forbidden from each other? The Quran, in keeping with its general principle of educating, does not fix any details. The details are left to human intellect and circumstances, although it is quite clear in the Quran that you are allowed to choose your spouse. In respect of Nikah (marriage) the Quran explained itself: Whichever among women you like you could marry them (4:3). It stated about the Nabi (PBUH) that he could not marry again, nor could he bring any more wives to replace the present ones. It then goes on to say: No matter how much their beauty appeals to you (33:52). Whether the aim is to marry or for any other reason, it should always be kept in mind that there must never be the slightest gesture which can arouse any wrong expectations in the mind of the opposite party, because: God always knows about your dishonest glances and intentions (40:19).

Remember, lewdness or immorality does not only refer to wrong doings concerning sexual intercourse, but the thought or desire of wanting to do so also comes under it, because it basically affects character. The moulding of character is after all, the aim of all restrictions and regulations.

## What should we do?

Now let us consider how the present circumstances should be tackled? Firstly, all the facts written above must have made it quite clear to you as to what the Quran is aiming at in respect of the relationships between men and women. The Quran aims to preserve chastity, both in men and women. After explaining the aim of the Quran, in reply to your question as to what you should do as an individual, I would repeat what Iqbal said to Muslims:

O Muslim, Consult your own mind and not the clergy.

If your query is as to what we should do in our present society to fulfil Quranic tenets, then this is a question which is always very difficult for me to answer. The query boils down to what people do on the basis of their own understanding of Quranic instructions. How should they go about acting upon them in a non-Quranic society? Why this question is difficult to answer is because a Quranic society automatically follows Quranic tenets. That society, with the exception of a few individuals, would consist of people who keenly want to mould themselves according to the Quranic pattern. As such it would not be difficult to promulgate Quranic laws in such a society. But when the whole society is working on non-Quranic lines, those few who want to follow Quranic directions find it very difficult to do so. For example, take the question of segregation. In a Quranic society, the majority would consider chastity the basic factor in life. Every man would consider it a crime to cast a dishonest glance towards any other woman, and the same would be true of women. In such a society men and women would be modest and would never eye each other in an unbecoming manner. As regards those who have evil intentions, the society will tackle them in the appropriate manner. Therefore just as it directed in the above mentioned lines how women should go out, the Quran also instructs how evil-minded people should be dealt with. The Quran calls these people 'hypocrites'.

## The Hypocrites

The Quranic term for hypocrites is quite comprehensive. It is ascribed for those who are presumable members of the Islamic society, but who disregard its rules and regulations. They are always thinking about how to hoodwink its laws. The Quran asks Momin women to hide their adornments when going out, so that they can be judged as belonging to respectable families. Thereafter it was revealed:

*If hypocritical people having dirty minds, spread rumours and try to shatter the peace of the society; it will become incumbent on the management of the society to take the required deterrent measures (33:60).*

The Quran then states the deterrent measures that should be taken against these people. The first step would be to take remedial measures after isolating them from the society. If such steps

do not show any improvement, then they should be deprived of their civic rights and privileges. If they still remain undeterred then they should be arrested. If after this restriction, they still defy the government, then this would be considered rising against the law, and the revolt would qualify for execution (33:61).

Then the Quran says that it is nothing new that has been stated. Whenever and wherever a society has been established according to the laws of Allah, the disruptive elements have had to cope with the same kind of laws. This is Allah's practice. Allah generally adheres to this manner (33:62). Since the laws of Allah are based on permanent values, one can never experience any change in them (33:62).

By the way Tahira, you must have noticed the great value chastity holds, in the principles of life. So much so, that preserving chastity has been called a permanent practice of Allah and these laws are never to be altered. These laws can never be changed, no matter what the circumstances of a particular era. In other words, the sanctity of chastity is a permanent value that cannot be affected by the changes in time. It is just as a permanent value today, as it was a thousand years ago.

## **Our Condition**

Such would be the society moulded on Islamic lines. Now keep this in mind, and observe your own society. Today the motive for going out is sheer the exhibition of 'beauty', even if they are devoid of any such attributes. Beauty, is a blessing of good health and endures with chastity, and there is a dearth of both of these in our society. 'Need' and 'errand' are either conscious or sub-conscious excuses; like the poet who said in his couplet: Everyday I resolve not to go to her house, but everyday an errand takes me to that place.

If it can be arranged that no man goes towards the roads where these girls and women loiter, spreading the scent of their personalities in the evening, then you will notice that after a few days all their 'engagements' would come to an end, and they would all sit at home vexed. It is mostly due to the enticement by such people, that our youth have become wayward. In circumstances where the 'hunted' ask the hunter to come and get them, then there is no need for a license to hunt!

This is how women are. On the other hand, the situation with men is that even if they see a lady walking along the road, without exhibiting herself immodestly, they satisfy their lust by passing the most shameful remarks, (as a poet once said, "I recognize the natural styles"). Without regard to whether they are educated or uneducated, the youth of the nation are deteriorating in their lack of character. In fact women of good families find it extremely difficult to go out, not only in their modest coverings but even in closed cars. Furthermore, the educated young men are more forward in this respect.

Over and above all this is that class which is supposed to educate our ordinary people in the right direction. The less said about these people, the better.

## **The Need for Right Education**

In these circumstances, my daughter, what should I suggest that we do socially? My suggestion for this particular segment, is the same as for the other aspects of life. That is, bring a change in your society and build it along the Quranic lines. When your foundation is stable, then the building raised over it will have all its angles and aspects correct. The basic problem relates to education; and education starts at home. It only develops in schools and colleges. As far as basic education is concerned, it is the responsibility of mothers like you who have understood the aim of the Quran and want to act upon it. Schools and colleges come thereafter. The change in such education is beyond either my reach, or yours and the lack of it is corroding our youth. This education was formulated by a non-Islamic foreign regime to subjugate its people. It did not encompass a solid character, the purity of thought, the sublimity of heart and the chastity of intentions. This education was prepared on the foundations of waywardness, unclean intentions and the excitation of base emotions. Along

with this education, pornographic literature is flooding the market. Everywhere one can see the immodest hoardings of cinemas. Inside houses you have radios blaring exciting songs that invade your mind. In such an environment to expect your youth to have pure emotions with their eyes downcast is like wanting to keep brimful glass of water from spilling over, when kept at an angle. The only alternative left with us to stem this volcanic tide is to spread the message of the Quran in our society. I have spent my life in this effort and want to do the same for the rest of my life. I know it is like a drop in the ocean; or as a poet has expressed, that 'it is like raising your voice in your quarters'.

But I keep going; if I can leave behind a few sons and daughters like Saleem and Tahira who can keep this tiny flame burning, then I shall feel rewarded enough.

Peace be with you!

**Parwez**  
**November 1953**

## [Home](#) **Our Modern Women**

### *Tenth Letter to Tahira*

Dear Tahira, I am grieved, like you, over the consequence of Shahida's married life but we have different reasons to be so. Your sadness stems from the fact that Shahida is your childhood-friend with whom you shared good and bad times, and now it is painful to see her pathetic condition. Whereas what saddens me is that Shahida turned a deaf ear to what I had been telling her for so long. That eventually she had to face the expected result, made me shudder just thinking about. The difficulty in our society is that men generally are guilty of high-handedness and the victimization of women is a general rule. (I am hesitating to say that, and you may mind it, but the truth has to be spoken out). In a conflict between a man and a woman, other women will always side with the woman, and the man is, as always, considered the guilty party. If you consider Shahida's life and its consequences objectively, then I am sure you will agree with me that the outcome was in line with the positions taken. Saeed was not guilty. Rather the patience, courage and tolerance with which he bore everything is praiseworthy.

### **Life of a Modern Wife**

Shahida's lifestyle was such that she never woke up before nine in the morning, because she never slept before midnight. If today she is at the club; yesterday it was a big meeting where she had to speak, and the next day would be the last show of the seminar. If there was no function outside the house, then she would invite her friends to dinner at home and they would gossip till midnight. Poor Saeed had to work in the office the whole day long; how could he keep awake till midnight? In the beginning he kept her company till late at night, but later he found he could not cope. Anyway it was quite considerate of him that he never checked Shahida rudely or sternly. He tried to reason with her, but he was never harsh. She would return home at midnight, and he would get up to open the door for her. Their two little daughters had to go to school by eight the next morning. Just think how much of a botheration it was for the father to wake the girls up and get them ready for school, while their mother was still sleeping. But Saeed used to do all that willingly. The dilemma was that the elder girl was neither big enough to look after herself, nor was she so small that her father could bathe her and get her dressed for school. Moreover, this job could not be left to the servants, and he had to employ a Nanny for this purpose. Saeed knew that if the children were left completely to a nanny, it would affect their upbringing. Therefore, he looked after his two daughters himself. Along with this, he also had to be ready himself to reach his office by nine. All this was happening in house while Shahida was asleep.

She would wake up to find that her children and husband had left for school and office respectively. It would take her about an hour to get over the hangover of sleeping late. (This is a normal result of regularly getting up late). Breakfast would be followed by going through a newspaper or a magazine. As she was the secretary of the Women's Association, she had to check all mail and documents related to it. Then she would write an article for the Association's magazine, on how to bring up children and on having a happy home-life! Soon it would be time for lunch. After lunch she would listen to the radio or gramophone records, and then have her afternoon siesta. If the children returned before their mother had her afternoon nap, they would say "good morning" to her. Otherwise, the servants would feed them and they would start playing. Then their tutor would come and they would become busy with studying. Mother would get up, have her bath and tea, and would then either go to the club to play badminton or table tennis or else, or go out for shopping. Saeed would come home tired with work, and would then start looking after the kids, the servants, the household accounts and checking things in the house. Dinner (provided they were not dining out) would be at the family table but here too, quite often, the conversation would become sour. Shahida was always complaining about uncouth servants, the unorganized house, the ill-mannered children and an inattentive husband. When

Saeed used to so much as remark about how much interest she took in the home, things would get worse.

### **III-Health**

Well Tahira, have I written anything wrong? If it is incorrect then you are responsible, because you are my prime source for all this information! You also used to tell me how you tried your best to change her, but she always turned a deaf ear to all your suggestions. You also told me that this was not only the cause of her disorganized house-life, but that it also was effecting her health. Not sleeping or eating on time, or regularly dining at hotels or clubs was taking its toll upon her health. At such places, the emphasis is mostly on clean crockery, (although nobody knows how they clean them), but nobody thinks of the food ingredients. As health worsened, it made her more jittery and consequently increased expenses.

### **Increase of Expenses**

First it was the many servants that increased the expenses, (and many servants had to be employed because Shahida was too busy with her social engagements and her Women's Association to be able to attend to her home), and now it was doctor's fees and the driver's bill taking a toll. Income was limited to Saeed's salary only. How could that salary cope with these increasing expenses? If Shahida had cared then she would have decreased her personal expenses and balanced her budget. But she did not reduce any of her expenses. Saeed had to borrow money, and that decreased his income all the more, because of the deduction to pay the installments on his debt. On top of this, Shahida demanded that she had to go to New York to participate in the All World Women's Conference, as the Secretary of her Association. There she would listen to deliberations on human welfare in general, and women's rights and obligations in particular. The Association did not have enough money, so she got a resolution passed that every delegate would pay for herself. It was impossible for Saeed to procure such a large amount and whatever he had, was not concealed from Shahida. She knew about each and every penny of his income and expenses, as Saeed had never kept any secret from her. Tahira, so many times you said to me that Saeed really justifies his name. (Saeed means good omen).

### **..... and This Step**

Over and above all this, Shahida got annoyed and left with the children for her father's home, from where she filed a case for divorce. Now Tahira, you tell me how far her taking this step was justified? Granted, men are cruel, but does this story paint Saeed as bad? Poor women are generally the 'wronged against', but tell me, upon God, was Shahida the oppressed one?

This is not just Shahida and Saeed's story. It is becoming quite prevalent in our society. Just as, time and again, some things become a fashion in different societies, in the same manner the slogan of "Women's Rights" is becoming a fashion in our society. At least, I do believe that you would not misunderstand my words, because you do know how depressing women's subjugation is to me, and how much of an advocate I am for women's rights. And why not when Quran itself is such a great proponent of them.

### **Women's Responsibilities**

All I want to say is that every right is accompanied by a responsibility. Our ladies who are promoting women's rights are putting forth great demands, but they simply do not mention a single responsibility of their own. I am ready to fight for every right that has been given to women by the Quran, and which has been suppressed by men (who use religious laws which were formulated during the reign of suppressive kings as shields), with all the force at my disposal. You know I have been fighting for this since long, but along with it I want to remind my daughters and sisters of all the responsibilities which they have to shoulder, as women.

## Being Envious of a Man

Whether you admit or not, Tahira, it is a fact that in our times, (sub-consciously) women have come to think that it is an utter disgrace to be a woman. This creates a conflict in their minds, which manifests itself in such slogans that women are equal to men. All the jobs which men can and will do, women can and will do too! On the surface these slogans sound so revolutionary and seem to raise the status of women. But my dear daughter, our sisters have yet to understand how much these demands and slogans are depressing their status. I quote the Quran, which said about the women of the era before Islam that in a dispute, she herself cannot explain her case explicitly (43:18). This is exactly the position of these women in our times. They rise to fight their case without understanding what their strengths are and what their demands are. They want to safeguard their rights and demand the status of men. Remember Tahira, a woman has her own place in this world. If a woman wants to give up her position in exchange for a man's status, it is nothing to be proud of. This, on the contrary, makes men believe that they really do have a higher status, which in turn makes women clamour for and demand their rights.

## Duties of Men and Women

In nature's scheme of things there is no difference between the status of men and women. However, their duties are different. Their physical and biological differences reflect these duties. This difference, in fact, is the reason why a greater part of a woman's life is spent away from the practical realities of life. Consider, for example, the responsibility of pregnancy, childbirth, lactation or nursing an infant. This 'handicap' does not mean that she becomes lower in status to a man. Looking at it from this viewpoint, raises the woman's status even higher than that of a man. Despite these 'handicaps', a woman, if she wants, can do everything a man can do. But a man can never, no matter how hard he tries, accomplish what a woman's 'handicaps' can perform. When a woman asserts that she wants to fulfil the duties of a man, she not only lessens her position, but she also pronounces a radical change in the nature's scheme of things. This is so, because if they start performing men's duties, then who will perform the duties of women? A man is not capable of performing these duties. Please remember, my daughter, that woman is responsible for the posterity and propagation of the human race. If she considers this ability to be demeaning and finds it difficult to fulfil her duties, then she would be interfering in nature's plans. The outcome is that, in spite of demanding her rights, she is depriving herself of the satisfaction that would come from fulfilling the duties prescribed by nature. As such, she has trapped herself in a psychological tussle. She cannot erase the biological difference of her physique, but by hating it and instead taking pride in man's physique, she has put herself into a self-made cauldron of discontentment. Tahira, firmly put in your mind, that by virtue of being a female, a woman qualifies herself for immense dignity and respect. But who would be more unfortunate than she, if she feels ashamed of being a woman? Her penchant for striving to be a man, robs her of mental self-enlightenment and the warmth of her humanness. There cannot be a worse predicament of her, and for that matter for humanity.

Remember Tahira, home plays a foundation laying role and the family has a pivotal position in the formation of the human race. A society that does not maintain the 'family' (as it is happening in Europe in general and in Russia in particular) then its forthcoming generations are bound to be wayward and rudderless. Woman plays a central role in forming a home, hearth and family. She has a major share in making a heavenly home and a dignified nation. If a woman tries to shoulder men's responsibilities by ignoring her own precious and important duties, then she is being unfair not only to herself but to her own society and to the whole of humanity. When I say this, I do not mean that women should not participate in what men are doing today. All I am saying is that she should fulfil her prime duties first, and when she is content that she has done this satisfactorily, then by all means she should participate in other aspects of life.

## European Women

Copying Europe blindly is what makes things difficult for us; and the greater predicament is that we are copying at a time when Europe itself is trying to get rid of such aspects and their unwholesome consequences. In Europe women rebelled against men and started agitations for their rights. In fact, this was a reaction to Christian education that considers a woman's status to be the lower. Christian education states that woman was made from man's rib, and as such she is curved like a rib. (It can never be straightened and if you tried to do so, it would break). This education professed that all evil in the world is due to women, because Eve misguided Adam out of his heaven; that soul is meant for men only; and that women (like animals) do not have souls. A logical and incumbent consequence of this education was that women tried to be men. The first step towards this goal was to abandon their womanly duties. They thus started abrogating one by one, the factors that are essential for constituting a home. Gradually they reached a situation where there remained no difference between a home and a hotel. I do not mean that no cooking was done at home. What I mean is that a loving and genial relationship between a husband and a wife deteriorated, and what the Quran calls: the women are like a dress for the men and the men are like dress for the women (2:187), the relationship more or less became a business partnership. The children, in the first place, were considered as cumbersome intrusion. The children that were born were deprived of their mother's warm loving lap and their first learning ground. European psychologists have recently reached a conclusion after extensive research, that those children who have been separated from their mothers before they were three, turned out to be criminals and wayward when they grew up. Therefore, Europe is gradually reverting to home life, after it learned a bitter lesson from its mistake. However, we seem to be starting the house-desertion at the time when European women are turning back from their rebellion.

There is another interesting phenomenon. The discussion starts with men's cruelty to women; that the men remarry, deserting the first wives, leaving them to starve, and ruining their children. The girls do not get their dowers (when they get married), and no one is responsible for their caring and up-keep. This leads the women to demand that she should have a larger share of jobs; and that they should have so many reserved seats in the Assembly (Parliament). Obviously oppressed women are not in a position to get a job in an office or to become a member of the Assembly. Those who are able to get jobs in the offices, or become members of the Assembly, are usually not the oppressed and down-trodden ones.

## **Member of Assembly**

Those who go to the Assembly can never ameliorate the condition of the oppressed ones. As you know, I am not against women becoming the members of the Assembly. But a woman who comes forward to safeguard the rights of her class (whether it is in the arena of leadership or in the house of Assembly) we should first check what she has done to set her own house right? How is her relationship with her husband? How much time does she spare for her children's nurturing, education and care? How much time has she given to the oppressed and poor class of women? Has she taken any practical steps to lighten their burden? Please listen again, we have to check as to what she has done practically? Our leaders and representatives do not go beyond, making speeches, issuing statements and getting resolutions passed. I need not dwell upon these things in detail because, these are all the things which you used to say to Shahida. Then she used to brag about reforming the whole society (rather humanity). Right! But her own house was in disarray! She used to formulate programs on how to care, nurture and educate the whole future generations on correct lines; and she herself never even asked her children as to what they did or what they studied? She tells all the women of the world how to win their husband's hearts, but she herself could not succeed with a husband like Saeed. In her essays, her heart bleeds for the condition of the wronged and oppressed women; but she is absolutely ignorant about the real lives of these down-trodden women and their living conditions. She reproaches others for (not doing anything for) their daughters and sisters who do not have enough to wear, while she orders silken brocade mattresses for her dogs and for herself. Tahira, you yourself used to reprimand Shahida for all these things. After all this what do you think would be the outcome of Shahida for leading such a life? As for the welfare societies she used to form for the betterment of those women, what example can she set for them?

## **Practical Example**

Remember my dear daughter, the person capable of reforming a society is the one who can say with full confidence, to a gathering of not only his friends or admirers, but his adversaries: I have lived my whole life among you, can you not surmise whether my claims are truthful or false? (10:16)

The one who cannot make such a statement can neither have a successful life, nor revolutionize a society. Until the 'Shahida' of our nation can look after her own house and herself, she cannot become: the caretaker of humanity (2:143). (Quran assigns this duty to the Muslim nation). This is the stable system of life (30:30). It is generally said, "Don't see who is saying it, but listen to what is being said". Meaning if somebody advises you to do good, do not reject it by saying "physician heal thyself". You should evaluate whether whatever is being said to you is good or not. If it is good follow it, if not then reject it. This maxim is true, but it only applies to the person who is being advised. It is also necessary that the advisor should adhere to the principles he is propounding, otherwise his expositions would not be effective. Actions always speak louder than the words. People, not conforming to their principles in their practical life, can never reform a nation. This is the main reason why our Women's Associations have not been effective. The women of these associations who want to reform others, lead lives that require much desired reforms themselves. If they can set their own homes in order and then come out to reform, then you will see how their efforts will bear fruit. But if they want to keep a house like Shahida's and then want to set their nation straight, then it is nothing more than deceiving others, besides themselves.

Finally I would like you to understand that if a woman has high ideals of collective life and believes she would be unable to fulfil her duties as a wife, then she should not marry (however, exception should be made for a person who is fully equipped to live this kind of life). But if she marries, then family duties should take the priority.

Peace be with you!

**Parwez**

## [Home](#) **The Importance Of Minor Matters At Home**

### *Eleventh Letter to Tahira*

My dear Tahira, you must be wondering about the fact that on the one hand, the Quran suffices with basic instructions on important matters of life, while on the other hand it gives specific guidance on minor matters in society. For instance: "Don't be caustic to people; do not shout (or yell); do not be arrogant; get permission before you enter somebody's house; How you should sit formally; if you have completed your work, do not waste other people's time in aimless talking etc. etc". But my dear, perhaps you have not pondered over how important these little things in life are! Major problems are faced in life occasionally, and these are generally confronted by special people. But you come across these everyday happenings at every step in a society, and by everybody.

### **Small Happenings**

The foundation of the fort of life, no doubt, is built upon those facts which the Quran describes as principles, but the rest of the building is constructed on it by these bricks which are known as the daily small happenings. Just imagine, no matter how much of a 'man of principle' a person is, if he is impolite and caustic, then although the people who deal with him will learn from his principles, he will in fact cause them more distress than benefit by his impoliteness. People will shrink away from him and avoid meeting him. In fact, a person's character is depicted by these small gestures. Adhering to principles is like fuel in the car of life. It is true that a car moves with petrol in it, but you know how much Saleem cares for the engine oil that goes with the petrol. He says the lack of petrol would at the most bring the car to a halt, but if the oil is not there, it would burn the engine. If following principles is like petrol, then the 'small details' of life work like oil. If these are missing, they cause friction which can burn the delicate strands of a mutual relationship. Just consider whether these small details which the Quran describes for social life are of passing importance, or are they vital like permanent values? Is impoliteness and being caustic, which was shunned fourteen hundred years ago, considered praiseworthy today? You will see that these things are just as important today as they were then. These social etiquette and manners have their own standing, and it is absolutely necessary to follow them and to preserve them.

### **Social Manners at Home**

These social manners and morés are important in every aspect of life, but their importance is greatly enhanced in home-life. I see so many families (husband and wife; or other relatives) where there was nothing objectionable as a rule, but ignoring these niceties at home ruined their peace and contentment; or at least it is no longer the same between a husband and wife, a life which the Quran calls a haven of love and peace. Just think of it, when a husband comes home with a smiling greeting and the wife greets him graciously, how depressions and frictions can get drowned! When one person's un-intentional mistakes could be rebutted by only a real smile, it would certainly reward one with a heavenly home. Also, if one person flares up and the other remains soft-spoken, this would douse a fire. On the other hand if a wife gets annoyed and goes to the other room poutingly, instead of discussing a conflicting problem seriously, it could create a deep rift between the two people. Also not admitting one's shortcoming, and keeping on arguing to prove one's point, can rob a home of its peace. Here I am talking about impoliteness or sour behaviour and the like, but I have observed that carelessness in small matters around the house creates a tense atmosphere at home. You must have seen your late aunt, but you did not have the opportunity to observe (or study) her home-life. You were quite young when she died. About her, I can say with certainty, that she never ever committed a crime or sin throughout her whole life.

### **Exemplary Righteous Woman**

She was a rare example of honest and upright life, a personification of honesty and chastity. So soft hearted was she that if a thorn pricked the foot of a servant, she would cry the whole night. She was such a contented woman that she never asked your uncle to buy her clothes or jewellery. Your uncle led a simple and modest life, despite his handsome income. By simple life, I mean that whatever was left over after fulfilling their general needs, was spent on constructive purposes for the welfare of humanity. He was posted to a high office. Everybody could see the affluent life-style of his contemporaries. They had cars, big bungalows, servants, chandeliers, glitter, jewellery, and expensive clothes. In short, they had everything that is considered essential for the household of officers. Your Aunt could see all that and realized the comparatively simple life of her home, which may be referred to as "poor". But she never cared and never complained, let alone even thought of what her standard of living was compared to theirs (The Jones). You will be surprised to know that the late lady did not know what your uncle's salary was, and neither did she ever feel the need to inquire. Ponder, Tahira! Could you find such a woman today? You also have your uncle whom you know better than I do. If she was unique among women, then he was a person of outstanding qualities among men. He has lofty qualities of head and heart, even in his old age. It is so obvious that if you do not find heavenly the family life of such a husband and wife, where else would you find heaven on this earth? But you will be surprised to know that in spite of all this, the outcome of such a companionship was not as pleasant as it should have been. But do not misunderstand! You can gauge the nature of their companionship from the fact that your aunt passed away when your uncle was still a middle-aged man. But after that, the idea of a second marriage did not even cross his mind. He has said to you many times, "I did not marry again because I could not find another woman like your aunt". What I want to say is that having all those good qualities would have ensured a heavenly home, but it was not. The reason was that although the late lady had such high standards of principles, she was not careful enough about the small everyday happenings. She was not a terse or impolite woman. How could such a sensitive and sympathetic woman be like that! But she was not careful about the small niceties around the house. On the contrary, uncle used to be very careful about the little details along with the lofty principles.

### **Punctuality**

For example, he believed in being on time. You must have noticed, punctuality was so important for him, and he was intensely particular about it. But your aunt, (like it is usual for the woman in our society), was never bothered by punctuality. This is a small issue, but think how much friction they must have been having on this one point, throughout the day. By friction, I do not mean quarrelling, I mean mental confrontations. Particularly, for a sensitive person like your uncle, this type of mental friction was worse than quarreling. We often noticed that whenever they had to go out somewhere, uncle used to be ready and waiting outside the door, but Aunt took her time coming out from the house.

### **Not a thing in its place**

On inquiry you found out that she could not find one of the shoes of the pair. This was the second difference in their habits. Uncle believed in a neat life style. You could get at this neatly kept things even in the darkness of night. You only had to reach for the thing you wanted, and you would find it even in the dark. In contrast, aunt's predicament was that if she found the salt shaker, then she would not find the pepper shaker. If the motor was in front of her, then she could not find the pressing stone. Whenever you went to her house, the first thing you heard was, "I had it in my hand a minute ago, but can't remember where I put it". This was the third point of incompatibility in their habits. Uncle's memory is so sharp, till today, that he can tell you where a stone or electric post used to be thirty years ago.

### **Absent-Minded**

Aunt's forgetfulness was such that one evening I saw the girdle on the stove and she looked worried.

When asked, she told that she had forgotten to knead the flour. She realized this only when she put the girdle on the stove. On the other hand, uncle's habit was such that if he would not get his meal on time, then he would not eat.

## Mismanagement

We had seen that when heading towards the bathroom from his room, on the way he would straighten a bed, or move a chair to its proper position, or arrange a curtain properly, or pick up a child's misplaced book and put it in the satchel. But when he reached the bathroom, he would notice that soap was missing, but the towel was there. If his shirt was there then his vest was not. He used to protest loudly over this. He knew how heavily the scales of untidiness tilted towards his wife's good traits. These drawbacks of her were due to wrong upbringing. He felt quite unnerved by it, as you can guess! But do not measure your aunt as raw material in house hold affairs or management. Absolutely not. The only thing was that she was not as careful as your uncle about small niceties around the house. It would not have mattered if your uncle, too, was like that. However, since his disposition was different, he used to suffer. If only aunty would have tried a little it would not have been difficult to over come her shortcomings. She should have done so.

Now, your friends, if not you, would surely remark: "See Mr. Parwez is after all a man, so he has sided with men". He says, "Aunty should have changed and made her habits congruent with uncle's. Why does he not say that uncle should have tried to walk along aunty's traits"? But dear, if you look carefully, you will discern the fact that I am not for or against anybody. It is obvious that aunt's carelessness was not a good habit. On the contrary uncle's life-style was commendable. That is the reason why I have said that aunty should have changed her habits to eliminate the friction. If uncle would have been the careless one, and aunty careful, then I would have suggested the same thing for uncle.

If you ask, what if both had been careless? Then either they would have corrected their habits with mutual consent, or if that was not possible then they would have gone along with each other without friction.

## Compatibility

But how this kind of careless home affects children is quite obvious. It is absolutely necessary for a husband and wife to be compatible, first of all in principles then in matters of habits and directions. Do you know why Quran forbids the marriage of a believer Momin to a non-believing Mushrik woman or vice-versa? (2:221) Faith and disbelief are two antagonistic principles that take you to two different tracks of life. (I have told you this many times before). Quran wants to highlight this fact that men and women of antagonistic beliefs can never have a harmonious married life. If two such people do get married, then they would have a life of hell. Quran says, people who want to perpetuate such a relationship do beckon you to the fire. But God beckons you, as per this commandment, to a life that promises to be heavenly and protects you from destruction (2:221).

Have you pondered Tahira, why Allah considers the incompatibilities in matrimonial relationships as hell? These verses bring forth principal differences in faith, which are widely opposite ways of life. The Quran goes as deep as to say: Women impure are for men impure and women impure for men impure. In contrast to it: And women of purity are for men of purity and men of purity are for women of purity. (24:26). "Impure and pure" are very concise terms of Quran. They encompass the purity and impurity of mind and heart, piety and sordidness of habits, and of a character being pleasant or unpleasant. Quran discerns the compatibility of beliefs and practices as a basic condition for a husband and wife. It ties a hellish man with a hellish woman, and a heavenly man is strung together with a heavenly woman. Therefore, it is incumbent for making your married life heavenly, that a wife should instill all the good habits of her husband and a husband should make himself congruent with all the pleasant traits of his wife. In this context everyday niceties need to be

especially pampered. Leave alone our headstrong men whose brains are ridden with the faulty notions that men are in every way superior to women and have an upper-hand over them, and that therefore it would be an insult to condone their wives good traits. But our women, too, are too lazy to bring a change in themselves. Whenever, or if ever the husband encourages them to change, they retort by saying that they have been molded that way and that they would remain the same, whether they are good or bad.

"You can find the woman you desire from the West, so bring them from there". Just think, my daughter, what a negative mentality this is, and how destructive this kind of foolishness could be. If a husband and wife's relationship is like a body and apparel, then they have to fit to each other. The apparel should fit the body. The Quran says: They are your garments and you are their garments (2:187).

Now do you understand why the Quran emphasizes the everyday niceties, and how important they are for home-life? God be with you. My blessings for young Javed!

Please listen, by no means should your Uncle see this letter. He just cannot stand anything said against your late aunt. That respected lady had such a high character, and what a husband he was with such a purity of thought! Where one would find such people now!

**Parwez**  
**July 1956**

## [Home](#) **Why Our Homes Are Turning Into A Hell**

### *Twelfth Letter to Tahira*

My dear daughter Tahira, your question is quite correct and proper in its own right. We are always perplexed by the problem that wherever they are inhabiting this earth, Muslims are poor and destitute and compared to non-Muslim, they are weak and lowly. They are degraded and depended. You have observed that our homes are devoid of peace and tranquillity. There is no unity and friendship. There is neither cohesion nor harmony. Husbands and wives do not love and respect each other. There is no trust or faith. In short, our homes are like hell that engulfs the minds of people living in them. You are asking the reason for this, and you are justified in doing so. After all, what causes this? My dear, the reason for this condition is the same that causes our collective backwardness and poverty. Collective life and individual life are two branches of the same tree. On one side are civilization, society, economics and politics while on the other side are friendly relationships and life inside our homes. All these are the branches, stems and leaves of the same tree. If the tree is healthy and strong then all its branches will flourish, but if its roots are moth-eaten, then collectively and individually its leaves and branches cannot possibly be green and healthy. Just as it is impossible for a tree to have a healthy trunk and roots, but have wilting branches and leaves, in the same way it is impossible for an unhealthy tree to have strong, green and shiny branches. As far as our collective life is concerned, I have been explaining this fact many times (in my book "Reasons for Decline of Muslims") that the basic cause is 'religion' which we have wrongly adopted in place of the true way of life called 'Deen of Allah' (values of life contained in the Quran). Turning towards our home life, the reason for it being hellish is the man-made 'divine-law' Sharia that keeps us tied down on all four sides. Muslims are a religion obsessed nation, and such nations are quite strange.

### **Deen and Religion**

Deen means that we should accept certain permanent values (which mean eternal truths), and no matter what the world says or does, these remain immutable values. If these are the values that Allah has given for the guidance of humanity, then to practice and accept them as immutable, would spell that nation's superiority, welfare and prosperity in life. Moreover, the countries that have dealings with such a nation would also remain in peace and tranquillity. Such a nation would be considered as a true follower of 'Deen of Allah', but if it were to adopt man-made laws as immutable principles then its life would become hell. Further, as a nation it would be degraded and become inconsequential for others. The latter would be known as a religious nation. We have forsaken the Deen of Allah and are observing the restrictions of 'religion', which is producing the expected results. This is neither unnatural, nor extraordinary, nor surprising, nor alarming. It had been surprising if it would not have resulted in this. If you sow thorns then you get a tree full of thorns and that's nothing to be surprised about. It would, however, be surprising if it would start producing grapes. Now shall I tell you the difference that you have asked for, between "Deen" and "Religion", and how forsaking "Deen" and adhering to "religion" has made our homes a hell.

Firstly, you have cited the example of Arshad's home. Despite all amenities that house is devoid of peace. It is like a hearth in which you are burning damp wooden logs. The smoke is suffocating everybody. Do you know why?

### **Early-age Marriage**

Arshad got married when he was hardly twelve years of age and was studying in seventh class. Saghira was nine or ten years old. Saghira is the daughter of the sister of Arshad's mother. This proposal was finalized by the sisters, (meaning the couple's mothers,) of their own sweet will. It is so obvious that Arshad and Saghira could not possibly have exercised their choice at that age. After that

Arshad headed for the city, got his Master degree, passed the competitive examination, and went abroad. On his return he was immediately assigned to the post of Assistant Commissioner. Saghira, however, remained the rustic girl. Now you tell me how this couple would have fared? (It is actually a misnomer to call them a "Couple") The question is, why did this happen? This happened because marriages are solemnized under traditional "religious law". Leave alone children of ten or twelve years, by this law children of even twelve or ten months could be married; and this marriage would be considered justified and right. Now, who would object to something that has been declared lawful by this 'law'? Contrary to this, 'Deen' (Quranic Law) states that the age of marriage is when the person is an adult. That means that no marriage can be performed unless and until the boy and the girl are both adults. Further, it is specified that adulthood is not the only condition. Rather, Nikah (Matrimony) is a contract in which the consent of both the parties is absolutely necessary. It is obvious that when a contract of this kind is executed with choice and consent, then both parties would consider the disposition, education, shortcomings, upbringing, surroundings, habits, character and everything else about each other, and then decide. If our self-made 'law' were not the criterion, then it would have been impossible to get Arshad and Saghira married at the age of twelve and ten respectively. When they would have grown up, Arshad would have married according to his choice. Similarly, Saghira would have been married somewhere else more suited to her surroundings. There would have been better chances of compatibility and harmony.

Do you understand how this problem becomes more complex according to "Deen" and "Religion". Now take another example. Humayun and Riffat's home life was so enviable. They were both happy and harmonious. But did you see how when Humayun went abroad, Riffat was sad and morose all the time. Riffat did not suspect Humayun's integrity. She trusted him completely. But she was disturbed by the thought of his bringing another wife. What would happen then?

## Second Wife

Riffat thought of this because she knew that our 'religious laws' have given the man the right to marry a second (third or even a fourth) wife; any time he likes. He would not be reprimanded either socially or morally. This was the thought that bothered her again and again, and she was being corroded by it from within. It was not morally incorrect to express such fears, which she did on the insistence of one or two of her friends. Out of concern one of them even wrote to Humayun to beware of any such traps, for it would hurt Riffat mortally. When he came back, he was furious. When I asked the reason for his anger, he said, "Uncle, Riffat has degraded me. Why did she suspect me? How could she possibly have such baseless thoughts? Is this how she judged me after ten years of companionship? She has disgraced me and branded me untrustworthy". I heard all that with patience, and tried to divert his attention and calm him down.

You have known that Humayun never touched liquor, and never smoked. Two or three days after this incident, he was sitting with Hamed. Hamed took out his cigarette case, picked one cigarette himself and then smilingly forwarded the case towards Humayun. Humayun, too, smilingly took out one and, both of them lighted their cigarettes. After Hamed left, I confronted Humayun "You are a man of character and are a good follower of the Sharia (religion), but your smoking today has proved how hollow you are". He looked at me with surprise, and said, "Uncle, what are you saying? Smoking is not forbidden religiously or morally. I do not smoke because it is not my habit, but it is not forbidden like 'drinking'. Therefore, if I just picked up a cigarette, or even if I start smoking regularly, how does that sully my character. Uncle, you have said such a strange thing today. You never used to talk like that". I softly said, "Sorry, please do not mind me, I wanted to understand one thing which I have now comprehended. What you have said (suggests) that something which is not forbidden by 'religious law' is not considered wrong morally or socially, and if you felt inclined to do it sometimes, then it was all right to do so. You regard it neither a sin, crime or shame, and nor do you shrink from it". He said, "Quite right, that is how I understand it". This made me remark: "Sorry, our existing 'religious law' allows a man to marry again any time he likes. It is neither a sin nor crime. Neither is it morally or socially shameful nor regretful or regrettable. You adhere to this 'religious code': So if I

believe that you would marry again, anytime you like, is that an assault on your character or morals"? Humayun is very understanding person, and obedient too. On hearing this he lowered his gaze and putting his head on his palm, he sank into deep thought. After a while he lifted his head and, in complaint, asked: "Uncle, just tell me, why did Riffat suspect me. I was shocked and felt hurt". I replied, I am sorry, but Riffat is not at fault. In our society every woman has this kind of suspicion. She is always apprehensive of that unknown moment when her husband would bring along another wife. Normally such apprehension remains suppressed, but if her husband goes to a place where there are more possibilities for this to happen (as in your case that you went abroad) then the concern becomes more imminent. This makes a woman feel helpless, and moreover she feels the pangs of rivalry. Like every decent woman a faithful wife is always like that in respect of her husband. A Persian couplet reads:

I do not like your shadow. I adore you but I have thousand suspicions.

These are the sentiments under which a woman's mind works; which we men call, suspicion, apprehension, lack of trust, and deprivation of character. All this makes us angry. We should step into a woman's position and then examine the condition of our heads and hearts. Humayun kept on hearing all this quietly. At last he said, quite spontaneously "Riffat forgive me. I was mistaken". I could see tears glistening in his eyes.

Have you noticed, Tahira, how this man-made Sharia (religion) has robbed husbands and wives of their mutual trust and has turned our homes into hell? But Allah's Deen (Quranic Law) has not done that. Nowhere has a man been allowed to bring in another wife whenever he likes, absolutely not. If instead of adhering to traditional 'religion' we had followed Allah's Deen, then our lives would have been heavenly with mutual trust and faith, rather than hellish with mistrust and suspicion. Remember, suspicion (whether it is in the husband's heart, or wife's, and whatever its reason) is a thorn which does not let you rest for a second. Allah's Deen had eradicated this thorn; but we have forsaken the Deen and the resultant poisonous wedges are affecting our lives.

## **Divorce**

I have inquired about whatever you had said about Khadija. I had always believed that Khadija was a good woman. It is impossible that she would steal money from her housekeeping budget and keep it aside. Hence, what she told me corroborated my idea that there was some other reason. My dear, the reason is just what I have been writing about above. On my inquiry she said, "Brother, there is nothing to hide from you. Actually I do not know what has happened to Sughra's father. Every now and then he snaps and says, 'I will divorce you. You can take the children and go wherever you want to go'. In the beginning I thought, it was just his hot temper but now I feel he means it. Now I am so afraid that if one day he actually repeats 'Divorce' three times, what would I do? What would happen to these children? I do not have any property and there is nobody to look after me. This apprehension makes me curtail house expenses as much as I can and then (without his knowledge) I keep it aside. I know that like this, I cannot collect a substantial amount, but something is better than nothing. When an unfortunate time comes, at least I would have something with which to care for my children. I myself am afraid of God, and I know that this would be considered dishonesty. I have already decided that if, God forbid, I have to see this inopportune time, then I shall tell him (Sughra's father) that I had collected this amount from his earnings, and he can deduct it from my dower-money. One never knows whether he will pay the balance or not, but at least my conscience would be clear before God".

You see Tahira, how a good natured woman like Khadija was forced to do something to face a possible danger? Also imagine how a woman who is so apprehensive about her future, can spend her life in peace? If this is how a husband and wife's so called mutual trust is, how could that home have peace and tranquillity? This condition is not that of Khadija only, most wives in our society are apprehensive all the time. According to a poet,

Now the captor takes the knife, and now the door of the cage opens.

Why, because she knows that according to Sharia a man has the full right to, without assigning any reason, pronounce "divorce" three times verbally, and he can leave his wife. Just think my dear, if in a society a woman has that sword dangling over her head all the time, could the life in the homes in that society, be any the less hellish?

## Criticism On Islam

You might say that whatever I have written above, exposes even Islam to quite a few serious objections. Since Islam legitimizes these things, then the destruction of society or making home-life hell, is not the responsibility of men, but of Islam itself which has given such licenses to men. If Islam had in fact given such rights to men, then your objection would have been correct. But (as I have written many times) Islam has given no such power to men. These licenses have been issued by the 'Sharia' that was fabricated later. The Quran does not allow such things. The Quran does not permit the marriage of a minor. For Nikah (marriage), it is essential to be an adult. The Quran legitimizes a marriage only when it is with the consent of both the boy and the girl. According to the Quran, Nikah is a contract for which the basic condition is the consent of the boy and the girl. It does not allow any man to marry twice, thrice or four times, whenever he likes. Polygamy has been suggested as an emergency measure which has to be decided upon by the Islamic Government. The Quran does not allow a man to divorce a woman any time he wishes. It suggests a proper and legal channel to cancel the contract of marriage, and both sides have the right to negotiate. But the decision has to be executed by a court of law. Now you tell me, can Islam be criticized in any way?

## Early History of Islam

You say that the clergy quotes God's Messenger (PBUH) and his companions in favour of the Sharia. Incidents of their times are highlighted as showing that what they relate to must be the same in those times. I have written about it before (in a previous letter) as to which principles should guide us when we study the history of our early period. This is so clear:

1. The messenger of God (PBUH) led his own life in the light of Quranic principles.
2. Each and every word of the Quran is retained carefully and safely with us.
3. The history of the Nabi's (PBUH) time was compiled many centuries later.

Under these circumstances, we can clearly see the principle that whatever meets our eye about the Nabi (PBUH) in history, surely only that which does not go against the Holy Quran would be correct. If we come across something going against the Quran, then surely we can surmise without any reservations that it is incorrect. It has to be so because the Messenger of God (PBUH) could not act against the Quran. Such contrary episodes should be researched more. If more research is not possible, then it should be understood that either the incident happened before the law of the Quran was revealed, or else it is totally baseless and incorrect. For example, in favour of a minor's marriage, it is quoted that the Nabi (PBUH) married Ayesha® when she was six years old, but congruency of certain events shows this to be wrong. Ayesha® was at least sixteen or seventeen years old at the time of her marriage. The same applies to his other wives. These marriages were solemnized to tackle an emergent situation. I have mentioned about it in a previous letter.

Where divorce is concerned, I have written in my previous letters as to how to execute it. I do not feel the need to repeat it here. However, I do feel that the verse of the Quran, where the three divorces have been mentioned, needs elucidation. According to the Quran, the stating of three Divorces has a particular meaning: When all necessary steps have been taken in accordance with the Quranic injunctions and a divorce is the final solution, only then can the husband and wife separate. This is called the first 'divorce'. After this, if they so wish, they can remarry. If after becoming a husband and wife for the second time, they get divorced again, this would be the second 'divorce'. They are

allowed again to marry. But if a divorce follows again for the third time, then they cannot get remarried. The woman can marry another man only. (This restriction aside from the point that if her new husband dies or divorces her, then she can remarry her previous or first husband). This is what Quran means by 'three divorces'.

Now let us examine the sayings (Ahadith) attributed to the Nabi (PBUH) in this respect. Certain traditions state that 'three divorces' mean divorcing once every month, for three months, so much so that final divorce is complete after the third month. Other traditions state that you pronounce the 'three divorces' at the same time and this completes the divorce procedure. Along with this we also see the following tradition, too:

Rikana®, one of the Nabi's companions, divorced his wife during the Nabi's time. The Nabi (PBUH) made them reconcile and they remarried. He divorced his wife for the second time during Omer® the second righteous caliph. The third time he divorced her during the reign of Usman®, the third righteous caliph. (Mishkat, chapter Khula and Divorce, reference Abu Daud, Tirmizi, Ibn-Maja and Darmi).

This tradition shows that Rikana® divorced his wife for the first time during the Nabi's time. After which they got married again. The second time, divorce took place during Omer's® period, following which they got married again. The third divorce, took place during Usman's® reign. After this Rikana's wife could not re-marry him. Since this method of divorce is congruent with the Quranic injunctions, we can surmise that this tradition is authentic.

Have you pondered Tahira, as to what the Quranic criterion of judging the authenticity of traditions is? You should judge all historical incidents according to the Quranic standard, and only those that corroborate should be considered authentic. Under this principle, whatever is being observed by 'traditional religion' and what is against the Quran, should never be attributed to the Nabi (PBUH). We will have to admit that all this was fabricated much later. We should endeavour to replace this 'religion' which was fabricated later with the Deen which God revealed in the Quran, and which was practised by the Nabi (PBUH) and his worthy companions. This Deen can never have those tangles that have been mentioned in those heart-rending incidents.

## Condition of Modern Homes

This is the state of our "old fashioned homes". Where modern homes are concerned, they are even worse off. The only difference is that in the conservative homes their plight consumes their peace inwardly, and disrupts their contentment like tuberculosis. But in the modern homes this malady paralyses visibly, displays itself like a flaming fire. These modern homes are specimens of blind adherence of the practices of the West. What happened in the West (Christianity, like our man-made Sharia) is that woman revolted as a reaction to suppression she had undergone for centuries. The fire of revenge engulfed her in such a way that she became embodiment of rebellion and defiance! Our women took this as civilized behaviour and started emulating the same trends. The first result of this was that married life deteriorated into business concern. In this "business" a husband and wife's married life is like that of two partners in a shop. As long as it is beneficial to both, they keep it going, but when some other business looks to be more lucrative, they leave the former and join the latter one. In this partnership the dominant partner is the wife, because she has conditions written in the contract with which she keeps her husband under her thumb. As such, in the beginning this partnership is based on a purely animal level, wherein there is attraction and nothing higher than indulgence in emotional sex. After sometimes even this relationship becomes mechanical, and is kept going simply because they want to be recognized by society as husband and wife. Just think my dear daughter, when a house is erected on these foundations, can peace and tranquillity ever enter it? Remember my dear, domestic peace, harmony, real love and understanding can only develop in husband and wife when firstly, we are able to dispense with our man-made shackles which have tied down women for centuries; and on the other hand give up the immodest exposure which we have

adopted by blindly aping the West. Thereafter, our marriage institution should be regulated by God-made restrictions. This would help us lead lives of true freedom, so that our houses would become real heavenly abodes.

## **Stagnation of Woman**

Finally, I want to say something especially to you. In those homes where women are not haunted by "another wife or divorce" due either to the righteous thinking of their husbands or the women's ideal upbringing, and where men do not feel like they are living in a hotel, there is another problem which faces them. The responsibility of this problem that depletes a home of its peace that is ultimate aim of married life, lies with our virtuous and simple women. When Abid and Zahida got married, they were more or less of the same educational background. Their temperaments, too, were compatible. Their lifestyle, too, was almost the same. Hence everybody was satisfied about this marriage and thought that the couple would remain happy and compatible. For some time they kept marching together, happily and contented, after sometime, however, a rift started becoming evident. Gradually their difference of opinion turned into such a gaping rift, that nobody could believe that they had ever been compatible. The reason was that Abid kept expanding his knowledge and information, and worked hard to develop his tastes and mind. Consequently he kept progressing, while Zahida remained stuck to her grounds like a statue of stone. Abid tried hard to make her move from her place and to encourage her, but to no avail. She remained static. She was capable of progressing and keeping Abid's company, but what was needed was for her to feel its importance and to work hard for it like him. However, she never endeavored to do that. She always consoled herself by saying that God had endowed Abid with special head and heart, and that everybody could not be like him. "Moreover he does not have anything else to do, except reading and writing every day and night. But I have a hundred and one things to do. I, too, should either act like a fashionable woman, leaving the house to servants and becoming a bookworm or else I should look after the house. Only one thing out of these two options can be done. I prefer looking after the house. I do not have to study for a competitive examination, so that I could get a good job".

But as I have said above, this was a false consolation. It left only two options. Either (as it generally happens with us) Abid should have stopped progressing and have himself chained down like Zahida, or develop his potentialities and move ahead. He did the latter. The result was that after sometime he had gone so much ahead that the two life partners became poles apart. He loved Zahida, so he kept on urging her at every step, but Zahida was not willing to move even a single step. What this distance would entail was so obvious, but Abid was so noble that he did not let this develop into a collision. However, he could not be happy with the broken harmony. In the quiet moments of his life, he used to say to me, "I sometimes think that this bargain of mine, that is coming a long way ahead instead of being bogged down with Zahida is one of profit and loss. But I cannot decide conclusively. No body can fully feel my loss, so who can say how this bargain has been". Just think my daughter, what Abid's life would have been if Zahida had taken courage to do something. Not just Abid's life, but Zahida's, too, would have been different. I have said this last thing, because it has a lesson for you, too.

That's all. May God be with you!

**Parwez**  
**September 1956**

## [Home](#) **Choosing Marriage Partner for Daughter**

### *Thirteenth Letter to Tahira*

My dear Tahira, May God bless you!

It has been really a long time since I have heard from you. But your silence has meant contentment for me rather than worry, because you write to me only, when you face some untoward circumstances. Hence I remain contented when I do not hear from you. It means nothing is bothering you, and in our present society even this is a boon.

It seems only yesterday that you were asking me to suggest a name on the birth of your daughter Saira. And today you are asking for my suggestions on a proposal for a marriage partner for her. This turns out the mind to noticing how old we have become during this period. The sands of time keep on slipping quietly, and we do not even feel that every dropped particle lessens a moment of our own life.

Friends, specially daughters of the nation, seek my advice on many aspects of life, but I find suggesting a marriage partner is the most difficult and arduous task. The reason is my life-long experience has taught me that you may check the proposed boy from any angle, but I do not know what happens, as the minute he signs the Nikah (marriage) contract, his whole world changes and he becomes quite a different person. What can you say for sure for such a shaky unpredictable wall? I sometimes say to some of the ones who are close enough to me: "Son, you were not like this before". Quite simply they say, "No, Babajan (father), I was like this before. There has no change in me". I believe he is not being deceitful in saying this. He really does think that there has been no change in him. You keep on hearing such observations quite often: "He was the son of my real brother (or sister), and was raised and fed by me. He grew up right in front of my eyes. I do not know what happened to him after marriage? He is not now as once he was". It is at such times, when reason and thinking becomes helpless and hopeless, that she cannot say anything except. "First I did not believe in these things, but now I think he is under the spell of some Talisman". My dear Tahira, hopelessness gives birth to superstition. If she does not resort to superstitions then she props up her ego by saying, "I could foresee all this happenings, but this concerns marriage that has already been fixed in heavens. Angels have performed the Nikah beforehand, and what we do here is just to fulfil a customary formality". This, too, in fact, is a kind of superstition which has been rendered sacred. As saying goes:

#### **What should one do if one does not get to know you?**

However, you do not believe in talismans or heavenly marriages, so you should not shun your responsibilities. Examine an issue to the best of your ability, and then decide. I, too, would suggest the same in these circumstances.

Our drawback lies, in fact, in the criteria of our examination. We look for a healthy, strong and handsome boy. He should be educated, earning satisfactorily, belong to a well-to-do family and be respected in society. Furthermore, for we still have not been able to break the chains of dark ages, we try to be sure that they belong to the same clan or extended family, and that the family is eager for the proposal. Just consider, after satisfying all these standards, is there any other stumbling block left for selecting him?

There is, however, one element on which the whole of married life revolves, and it is always overlooked. Nobody cares about the temperament of the boy, and what kind of tastes he has. In short, how is he psychologically? For this, no doubt, deep vision and keen observation is needed. Without it, you cannot have companionship in married life. In this respect, from whatever I have learnt from

my forty years of observing different families and taking into account their pros and cons I feel I should inform you of the consequences.

1. If the boy suffers from an inferiority complex then all factors such as health, strength, education, career, good upbringing and respected family status cannot save the home from becoming a hell. The famous Pakistani poet Faiz has aptly said:

*Why ask the pious Sheikh for the justification of liquor; for him even moonlight is forbidden.*

This kind of house cannot boast of any moonlight, blooming flowers or a fragrant atmosphere, the wife's smiles and children's laughter get suppressed. The house is picture of depression. Children cannot talk to their father with frankness. They try to gauge his moods with slanting glances. The wife, too, is discouraged to talk candidly. All the natural antics of children seem like ill manners to him, and all their playful prances are branded as naughtiness. He is never likely to fulfil his children's requests. His "philosophy" is that this would spoil their habits. Social relationships (even if there are with his own relations) breed contempt. The basic reason for this contempt is that no matter who or what one talks about, he sees in it something that is disgraceful or disrespectful to him. You can well imagine the plight of a house with such a difficult mental state 'mental patient' in it. That house cannot be a home, but rather a sub-jail for prisoners, and its "silence" would be like that of a graveyard. The paradox of such a person is that he is regarded social, gentlemanly, noble in the world outside his home. People keep on praising him for his "non-indulgence in vices and for his regularity in saying his prayers". This increases his malady all the more and along with suffering from inferiority complex, he becomes self-deceptive.

2. In contrast there is the other type who suffers from superiority complex. Nobody is praiseworthy in his eyes. He is always looking for other peoples' weaknesses and drawback. He cannot praise anybody except himself. He would complain about his wife, as to why her head nods when she kneads flour! His poor children are always hounded by his temper. He always calls them "sons of an ass", frowning with angry eyes and always with a rod in hand. It gives him pleasure to disgrace others. He disgraces his wife in front of her relations (and even servants), and is proud about it. These wrong doers, the jacks of all trade, and self-centred husbands, keep the house a smouldering hell. People praise him for his courage and outspokenness and for speaking the truth, because he tells the truth to everybody's face. He has no reservations. Intoxicated by all these praises, he never feels the need for soul-searching or self-accounting.
3. Then there is this miserly type, whose aim in life is collecting pennies: collect wealth and keep counting (104:2). They keep on collecting, penny by penny. They even measure the flour before giving it to their wives. Then, they would check to see if there is any left-over bread, which they would wrap in a napkin and put away, so that their wives cannot give it away to any needy person. This attitude does not help to fulfil the household needs adequately, and also badly hurts the self-respect of the wife. She cannot gain any self-confidence. She feels disgraced in front of her relatives and acquaintances. When children compare themselves with their classmates, they start suffering from an inferiority complex. If he is ever reprimanded for being so stingy about the needs of his wife and children, he replies, "It is for their good that I do this. Everything belongs to them. I will not take all this along to my grave". Who can tell him that the best materials should be used for the foundations. In this world, if a building has weak foundations, it will not be able to withstand even one blow of adversity. Foundations of life are erected on human relations and not on money or wealth. But this concept would not sink in their minds and they would keep their houses like jails, where every prisoner gets counted bread, measured lentils and numbered clothes.
4. Remember one more thing, those who demand dowry are business minded, and one should

never think of accepting them. For them marriage is not companionship, but a source of income. Such a boy would not limit himself to dowry, but he would always keep on pestering his wife to get this, or to get that, from her parents. If ever his demand is not fulfilled, he turns his wife out.

5. There is 'crazy' type of boy, too, who threatens suicide if he can not get married. If he is enacting a drama, then he is hypocrite. It is a must to avoid him. If he is sincere, then he is being overly emotional. You have to save yourself from him, too. Married life cannot be sustained on emergent emotion crutches. It needs stability and motivation, life-long stability and a balance between head and heart. "There is not crazy for going" type of balance. Philosophers and poets do not have happy married lives. The car of a philosopher has petrol only, no engine oil, and the poets have even their fuel tanks full of oil, so the cars of both types cannot function.

Saira is a very sensitive girl. She has taste, high thinking, and broad-mindedness. She is pleasant, highly educated and well versed in domestic affairs. To choose a life partner for her, you have to keep in mind all these qualities. You also will have to keep in mind that the boy should not be suffering from the above mentioned mental maladies.

I know you will say, "Uncle dear, I solicited your suggestion and you have left me in the lurch. Tell me, where can I get Mr. Right? Where would I find a boy with such qualities?"

I am afraid you may not repeat that story which I told you one day. A certain clergyman was delivering his sermon and telling the congregation that "the way to Heaven "Sarat Bridge" passes over hell. It is finer than a hair and sharper than a sword blade. The slightest wavering of your feet would land you in hell". An old Pathan from amongst the listeners remarked, "Mr. Maulvi (clergyman), why don't you say in plain words that there is no way that one can go to Heaven". You, too, would say the same. Not only you, even great scholars got despaired in their search of an ideal human being. I hope you remember that poetic assertion by Rumi whom Iqbal has cited in his book "Asrar Ramooz" as opening remarks:

*I saw a pious man roaming in the city with a lamp in his hand and saying that he was fed up of these animals of prey and being preyed upon, and that he was looking for a human being.*

*I said: "I, too, looked everywhere but could not find a human"*

*He said: "I am, too, looking for the one whom you cannot find".*

Hark! With this ideal in mind, you might keep Saira unmarried all her life. I have seen many girls developing silver strands in their hair looking for the 'ideal'. In practical life let caliph Omer's® principle light your path. He said that in respect of marriage idealism does not hold. You have to resort to adjustment and an attitude of give and take. Somebody inquired that he was always seen walking about with a baton in his hands. "How do you fare at home"? He said, "For domestic life I stick to the principle which is, live in the house like a child but if you have to fulfil a family need, only then behave like a man".

I hope you will convey this principle to Saira, too, that in respect of marriage, idealism does not work. You need to adjust.

Whatever I have said about choice until now is the preface to the 'book of criterion'. The real book that starts now, is called "Mother-in-law". This is that gordian knot which even Socrates could not unravel. You must have heard that saying about the relationship of a mother and her daughter-in-law. A neighbour asked about the new daughter-in-law, as to how she was? She replied, "Dear girl, do not ask! I have been unlucky right from the start. When I was the daughter-in-law, my mother-in-law was not good. Now that I am the mother-in-law, I did not get any good daughter-in-law". This is the

gist of the mother-in-law and daughter-in-law relationship in our society.

Whatever her own mother-in-law did to her, the woman takes it out on her daughter-in-law, either consciously or sub-unconsciously. There is no doubt that you can find a mother-in-law who treats her daughter-in-law like her own daughter, but this would be an exception. As a rule what happens is as has been mentioned before. I have seen quite discerning women pursuing a proposal so vehemently, that the soles of their shoes give way. They have to implore so much that the edges of their teeth became smooth.

When the requests of many friends and relatives did not bear any fruit, a mother headed towards shrines for pledges and promises. She made pious people pray on her behalf. You could see so many amulets and talismans in her house, all for her wish to come true. Years of tireless efforts bore fruit and she did get a wife for her son. But before the week was over, she started nagging her daughter-in-law. The daughter-in-law was neither a stranger, nor an unknown person. She was the daughter of her own real sister. The poor girl was a novice and quite inexperienced. She could not understand what had happened. Till yesterday this was her aunt's house. It was just like her own home; and she was such a loving aunt, and those were her loving cousins of hers. Today the whole house was like her enemy. What mistake did she make? Nobody could understand this turning of tables, least of all she herself. From morning till evening she had to endure sarcastic remarks. She could not utter a single word of complaint. If she said something privately to her husband, then he would show his regrets with moist eyes, tell her how helpless he was and ask her to bear it. How could this situation be remedied. Moreover, if he happens to be the kind how believe in heaven line under the mother's feet, then he would not hear of a single word of complain against her.

I hope you remember Tahira, that when you inquired about Javed's marriage, I had said that until you can arrange for the new couple to live in a separate house, do not get him married. My suggestion was prompted by the circumstances of having a mother, and mother-in-law, like you. But now Saira has to go to an unfamiliar house. Therefore, never overlook my advice on marrying your daughter to a boy who is financially not dependent upon his parents. Also, after marriage the husband and wife should live in a separate house. You will then see that more or less, their relationship with everyone will remain pleasant.

Last but not the least is that warning which should have been at the top of this chapter. Never go near a 'religious' minded boy, that is one who does not adhere to Deen (the Quran), but practices the 'religion' which people these days call "the one who likes Islam". Such a person has heard such 'cock and bull' stories from every pulpit and mosque ever since he was a child:

- That men are rulers over women, and he accepts as his belief that because woman was created from a man's ribs, so she is crooked and destined to remain so, and that, if you try to straighten it, it will break but it will not become straight.
- That a husband can beat his wife and nobody is supposed to question him about this.

The Messenger of Allah (PBUH) is supposed to have said, "If I could order humans to bow before somebody other than God, then I would have ordered the woman to bow before her husband". He is also believed to have said, "After my death there is no danger greater for men than women". This and many such fabricated traditions have been handed down to us.

Now there is another issue to surpass all this. These days the civil laws that are being formulated and enforced in Pakistan, do not recognize a woman's testimony in respect of capital punishments. Where she is acceptable as a witness, then the testimony of two women would be equal to that of one man. So much so that if a woman is murdered, her compensation (in terms of the value of her life) would be half the compensation of a man's life.

My daughter, a boy who accepts these things as divine laws and believes that God's messenger

(PBUH) ordained them, cannot think of being a life-partner to his wife. Companionship requires equality and parity. However, to him the equality of sexes would go against his belief. He would consider bringing his wife at par with him to be a sin. He would suppress his wife, and would be happy to think that he is fulfilling and adhering to a divine law. Since these beliefs and traditions have been observed and are prevalent in our society for centuries, even 'educated class' has been sub-unconsciously affected by them. In our society a wife addresses her husband respectfully, but there are very few husbands who would do the same. He would always address her in a demeaning manner. The English language hides this discrepancy, since 'you' is used for both genders. But when you talk in your own language then the difference inevitably becomes clear. Furthermore, considering a woman inferior is not confined to a wife only, it extends to her whole family. You must have seen in almost every home, that when the 'son-in-law' comes to his in-law's house, (although he may be an insignificant person in his own right) he does not consider himself to be less than a prince. Besides expecting special pampering, he expects everybody to be at his beck and call. During this time the wife is in a dilemma. She is constantly alert lest her parents, brothers, sisters, and even her friends or relatives, may not say or do something that might irritate the delicate disposition of her husband. If by any chance some such inadequacy does happen, then the consequences the poor girl has to suffer need no elaboration. The same ugly situation raises its head if the girl's mother might say something about the boy's mother or sister, which is more than they can swallow. These are very delicate matters and need utmost care and caution. In our society a girl's marriage is aptly summed up by this Persian line:

Loyalty transfers you to the realm of slavery.

Since we are talking about in-laws, I want to explain you something from another angle, and this I am bringing to the tip of my pen most reluctantly. You know that a wife's brother is called 'sala', and 'sala' is considered to be an abusive word in our culture. The same holds true of the word 'susra' (wife's father). Till yesterday these salas and susras were respectable people, now after marrying their daughter, they have become abusive 'words' (my saying this is ripping me apart). Educated people have started using the crutch of the English language to hide this shortcoming. They call them in-laws. In a way this is better, but it, too, has a hurdle: Brother-in-law could be your wife's brother or he could be your sister's husband. So when you have to specify the relationship, you cannot help resorting to the same degradation.

I am writing all this just to emphasize that this tree of degradation (Shajrat-uz-Zaqoom) of women has such long sprawling tentacles. The Quran talks about both the relationships, parental and in-laws (25:54). How heavenly would be that society in which men and women are considered equally respectable; and when this evergreen tree springs forth and bears delectable fruits and flowers, that society would attain sublimity in which human beings can flourish, prosper and respect one another.

I want to say something to dear Saira, too, although she is academically more advanced than us, (by the grace of God, she has a Ph.D. degree). There is, however, one aspect in which we take over, and that is experience. The foundation of whatever I say to the young generation of our nation is based (along with Quranic truths) on experience. Since they do not have this "wealth", they listen to us, the older generation, patiently.

After marriage, the man and woman (husband and wife) step into an utterly unknown valley. They should therefore be taking each step quite carefully and not decide anything hurriedly. Saira will be dealing with a man who, till yesterday, was a stranger. She should consider whatever information she receives as his perimeter. She would have no knowledge of what kind of a person he is. She would require time and patience to understand him. She should not form a hasty opinion. Marital life is a companionship for life. Companionship needs congruity towards this end, first of all, it will have to be checked whether their dispositions, tastes, habits, interests, attractions and goals of life, and the modes of reaching these, are shared. (It is far fetched to expect that these would be the same in both persons, but at least there should be some sort of sharing). To an extent these share values with your

husband. Let the conflicting elements lie dormant. As you become more congruent in the shared values, the distance between the conflicting ones would gradually become less and less. This phenomenon needs time. It is, however, a fact that, for whatever the reasons, men in our society do subconsciously (wrongly) believe that women are inferior to men. Then if your husband sometimes expresses such an opinion, you should not take it as an insult and get annoyed. You should overlook it in good humour, until he accepts that he was mistaken. If a gentleman's ego is not injured, then he quickly senses his mistake. If you are talking about social matters, the pitch of your voice should be softer than that of your husband. You should think of the husband and wife as two tennis players. If one hits a softer stroke the severity of the other player's blow is automatically mitigated. Your friction should never become an ego problem. God ordains: If you want to compete, strive towards all that is constructive (2:148). Express your ego in these good deeds. In this way your ego is transformed into your personality.

Always remember that the husband and wife are not only one unit; they are each other's confidants, too. The Quran symbolically relates them as 'body and dress' (2:187). Therefore, the secrets between a husband and wife should always remain confidential matters.

Just as you want your husband to respect your parents, brothers and sisters, in the same way you should respect his parents and relatives, too. Life always requires and demands reciprocity. You clap both hands, and one hand only delivers a slapping blow.

I would like to, in passing, give you a bit of advice as well, Tahira! I know how much you love Saira; you have raised her in such a cherished manner, she looks after the whole house. You are going to feel very bad about her 'send off'. (May God bring that day safely!) You should be mentally prepared for it. Remember that although ships certainly remain safe in the docks, they are not made to stay there, they have to venture out to the open seas. We should 'send off' our daughters with good wishes and good advice. However, our suggestions should not be according to our circumstances, but they should be advised to take into consideration their own situations and the demands of their times. We should not insist upon them to follow our instructions to the last details. A suggestion should remain a suggestion; and should not be turned into an ordinance. We should keep in mind that the new generation is more advanced than us in many respects. We should respect them.

After the marriage of a girl, you must have heard her parents exclaim, "Thank God, we are feeling lighter". This is not correct. This load should remain on your shoulders all your life. The 'send off' does not end her problems. She faces new problems after it. How long a daughter remains linked up with her parents was something told to me by an old aunt of our village. You remember our late mother who used to live in the village? At that time we were living in the city. Mother died at the ripe old age of hundred.

We all went to the village after hearing to her demise. I asked my younger brother to get the things necessary for her coffin and burial, from the village across the road. An old aunt was standing nearby. She inquired about what I had said to my brother, whereupon I told her that I had asked him to arrange for the coffin and burial. She heaved a sigh and said "We had heard that you were quite a learned man, but today I realize that you do not know anything. Don't you know that a daughter's coffin and burial is her parents' responsibility? She was the daughter of our village, we are responsible for her coffin and burial. You (the in-laws) are not responsible for it". This old aunt had said something quite normal, but it opened up many windows of thought in my mind. I thought about, how much in our society, a daughter is linked up to her parents, that even her coffin and burial is their responsibility. Thinking that the 'send off' ends her responsibility is naive. She remains connected all her life. The western society cannot gauge the depth and breadth of this relationship, whereby an adult daughter lives like a 'paying guest' in her parents' house. (We do not have an equivalent word in Urdu language, since the very thought of a guest 'paying' is alien to us). In the 'careless' western society, at the time of getting married she says Good-bye Dad, Good-bye Mummy and goes off, and never returns to see them. I admit that this 'clinging' nature of Eastern families and

indifferent attitude of the western family pattern, are both extremes. It is, however, a fact that even animals keep a link with their young while raising them. Human relationships are not limited to this extent only. The Quran advises us to love our near and dear ones (42:23), which is much beyond the animal level.

Despite keeping a link with your daughter all her life, efforts should be made to make her establish her own future home. She should not be dependent on her link with her former home. This reality should always be kept in mind, and parents, too, should realize that a girl's real place is in her future home. Her parents' home is like a place for rest and relaxation.

This letter has become quite long, but if you write after a long time, then this is bound to happen. God be with you. My blessings for Saira.

Your Uncle,

**Parwez**  
**May 1984**

# [Home](#) **Quranic Tenets**

## *Section 2*

The following chapter provides a summary of the tenets which describe the status of men and women and their mutual relationships according to The Quran. All these directives have been explained in the previous letters, but there they are all scattered. In this chapter all the directives have been collected under different respective headings, so that whichever topic one seeks guidance on can be referred to at a glance. These laws have been explained in detail in the previous letters; here they have been presented without elaboration, except in places where an explanation is considered necessary.

### **1. Status of Man and Woman**

1. Man and woman are branches springing from the same origin, so biologically they do not have any priority over each other.

*God created all of you from a single cell, from which He then made pairs (7:189).*

2. Man and woman are part of each other.

*All you men and women are from each other (3:159).*

3. According to the principle of division of labour, men are endowed with certain qualities which women lack, and women, too, have been blessed with certain abilities which men do not have. By virtue of these qualities, men have superiority over women, and women have superiority over men.

*God has given men and women priority over one another (4:32; 4:34).*

4. History tells us that the idea of a man being superior to woman developed when the concept of owning private property became a norm in society. Man made himself the owner of the private property, rendering the woman economically dependent on him. The Quran stopped this exploitation by ordering that men and women were the owners of their respective earnings.

*What man earns will be his and whatever the woman earns will belong to her (4:32).*

In the same manner The Quran fixed a woman's share of inheritance separate from the man. (This will be discussed again later).

5. Everyone should be rewarded for his or her actions.

*I will not waste the deeds of anyone, may it be a man or woman(3:195).*

6. It is incorrect to claim that Eve was deceived by Satan, and that she then led Adam astray. According to The Quran, Adam and Eve are not specific names given to a Man or a Woman. (Eve has not even been mentioned in The Quran by her name). Adam and his wife have been mentioned, and they stand for the men and women of the human species. This leaves us with Satan's enticing, and The Quran is quite explicit in this respect. It says: Satan lured both of them (2:36). Hence the thinking that woman started to sin and that she is responsible for man's shortcomings, is quite erratic. Both man and woman can err, and each is responsible for his or her misdeeds.

7. All the qualities that have been attributed to Momin men, also belong to Momin women.

*Men and women have equal qualities and propensities and, as such, those who have accepted Islam, those immersed in Islam; those who are restrained, truthful and*

*steadfast; those who do not violate the limitations set by God; those who keep their sexual urges within limits; and those who live within the boundaries of God's Laws, they all stand an equal chance to reap the benefits of their good deeds or to be punished for their bad deeds, and all deserve God's protection from adversity (33:35).*

8. Despite the basic common qualities, there is a difference between the natural duties of men and women, and these should always be kept in mind. According to natural division of labour, women are supposed to bear and rear children and look after their elementary training. These duties consume so much of their time and energy that they are rendered incapable of earning a living. On the contrary men have no such hurdles. That is why, in respect of the natural division of labour, The Quran says:

*Regarding those qualities due to which one sex has superiority over the other (that is, men over women and women over men), men are responsible for earning the daily bread. This is not mandatory for women. Out of their earnings men are required to fulfil all the needs of women (4:34).*

The income is to remain available for all household needs. It is not that because man has earned it, the income belongs to him and he gives her something out of it as charity. It is just the division of labour; man is doing one thing and the woman another. When a woman's needs are fulfilled in this manner, she will be able to develop the capabilities she is endowed with and utilize these according to the directions given by God.

## 2. Nikah (Marriage)

1. The love of a wife and of children is a great attraction for man. Therefore woman should not be considered an object of hate.

*The love of wife and children has been made attractive for men (3:145).*

2. This relationship is bonded through Nikah (marriage). Nikah is a contract which both the parties execute to lead a life as husband and wife within the boundaries of God's laws.

*This is a strong and binding contract (4:21).*

3. This contract (Nikah) can be executed only by a mature man and a mature woman and never by minors. The Quran itself calls 'maturity' the age at which 'Nikah' could be performed. Hence in Surah An-Nisa, the chapter called 'Women', it is directed:

*When you become guardians of orphans, you should look after them until they reach the age of 'Nikah'; and then if you see that they have attained mental maturity, let them have their money and property (4:6).*

Here you have been told to let the orphans have their belongings when they reach the age of Nikah. Surah Al-Inam tells us:

*Do not have ill intentions towards the belongings of orphans and have their welfare at heart till they reach the age of maturity (6:152;17:34).*

It is obvious that 'the age of Nikah' is maturity. According to The Quran, until a boy or girl is mature, they do not attain the age of Nikah. The Quran, as such, does not allow the marriage of minors, as they have not yet reached the age of Nikah.

4. Nikah is to be performed with the consent of both man and woman. Therefore, men are directed to marry those women whom they like (4:3), and as regards women, men are directed:

*It is absolutely wrong for you to take women forcibly or against their will (4:19).*

For Nikah it is necessary that you like the other person. To like the other person, just good looks should not be aimed at. The Quran emphasizes mental compatibility as much as possible.

5. If a woman of marriageable age does not want to negotiate this contract herself, she can delegate the authority to somebody else to do so (2:237).

In Surah Al-Baqarah, there is some reference to somebody who can do things on her behalf. This means a person in whom she willingly invests the power to speak on her behalf. Therefore the Nikah of a minor, through a guardian, is not possible.

6. A person who cannot afford a marriage, (or who cannot get a wife), is advised to exercise control over himself.

*If a person cannot arrange for or afford Nikah he should keep himself restrained (24:33).*

Sexual intercourse is absolutely illegitimate outside Nikah.

7. A Momin man cannot marry a non-believing woman, and neither can a believing woman marry a non-Muslim (2:221). Its reason has been stated previously.

8. Muslim men can marry the women from those people to whom the Book has been revealed (5:5). However, this is only a conditional permission, and all national interests and obligations have to be considered.

9. Nikah to the following women is absolutely forbidden: Mother, real or step; daughter; sister; father's sister; mother's sister; brother's daughter; sister's daughter; a girl who has nursed at the same woman's breast which the boy has; nursing mother; wife's mother; and wife's daughter from her first husband, if the daughter has been reared through her. However, if after Nikah, one has not had any sexual relation with his wife and he divorces her, then he can marry her daughter conceived from a former husband. Simultaneously taking two sisters as one's wives is forbidden. You can neither marry your real son's wife, nor a woman who is already married to somebody else (4:22-24).

Nikah does not aim at being a license for sex, rather it behests all the responsibilities that married life entails. If a man uses a woman for his sexual pleasure only, and does not fulfil and respect the responsibilities and restrictions which Nikah entails, then according to the Quran, this is not a Nikah in the real sense of the word. The Quran explains it in verse (4:24). This verse means to observe the restrictions and discipline and not sexual satisfaction only. The root of this word is "Safah", meaning to let it flow.

10. Nikah places equal right and obligations on the shoulders of both men and women.

*As a rule, a woman, too, has as many rights as her responsibilities (2:228).*

11. The husband and wife should be supportive and confidants of each other. Nothing should come between them.

*They (men) are like raiment to you, and you (women) the same to them (2:187).*

12. A husband and wife's relationship should be so pleasant that their home is like a haven of peace, harmony and tranquillity. Azwaj (couples) are meant to be congruent, and The Quran says: so they are a source of solace to each other. They should nurture love, caring and companionship for each other (30:21).

13. This attitude expands relationships. That is why the Quran has talked about relations with your own family, and with the family of your in-laws (25:54).

14. If a man gets so preoccupied with the needs and love of his wife and children, that he ignores God's prescribed boundaries and fails to decipher between the legitimate and illegitimate, then the same wife and children could become his doom and destruction. That is why The Quran warns:

*O Momins, surely some among your wives and children are in fact your enemies. Be careful of them (64:14).*

If, for their sake, you start hoarding wealth by hook or by crook then these same riches could annihilate your world, and the hereafter, too (64:15). That is why it is said:

*If these worldly assets make the man forget the laws of God, then he would be heading straight to hell (63:9).*

If ever any worldly attraction becomes your stumbling block on the path of organizing a society along the laws of God, then there is no doubt of your destruction.

It is, therefore, incumbent upon you to save yourself from this destruction-saving not only yourself, but your family, too. Your duty towards them is not only to provide for them, but to keep them safe from hell, too (66:6). (In this respect, you may refer to the section of siblings).

15. Sexual intercourse is a normal human phenomenon, so The Quran did not find it necessary to give any special instruction, except that there should be no such action during a woman's monthly periods (2:222). Sex is aimed at human procreation only, as is evident from this verse:

*Your wives fare like your fields, (in which you sow seeds). Therefore you till your fields whenever you like, (meaning when you want to sow the seed) (2:223).*

Sex is forbidden during fasting, but is not forbidden during the nights of the month of fasting (Ramadhan) (2:187). It is also not allowed during "Aitikaf" (a period when you are attending round the clock special session or meetings for pondering over serious state business or matters).

### 3. Dowry (Meher)

1. In life, the duties of a woman are such that she cannot spare enough time to follow a career. The Quran thus wants to make an arrangement so as not to suppress her economic freedom completely. As such there is a condition for Nikah, that when a man wants to marry, he should give the woman something as a gift. This gift is generally called Meher. The Quran has used three words for it, namely Sadaqa, Mataa and Ujur, and has referred to it as wealth (4:24). However, it may not necessarily be in the shape of money.

2. The Meher is not a compensation for anything. It is rather to be presented as a gift, without considering it as any kind of compensation. The Quran, therefore, has also used the word "Nihlatah" for it (4:4), which means without "trading or exchanging", just like a bee deposits honey in the hive without any thought of a return.

3. The Quran has not fixed any amount for Meher. Whatever both the parties agree, with mutual willingness, can be the Meher. Since the payment of Meher is essential, it should be whatever a man can afford (2:236). However, on the excessive side, it could be a mound of gold. If you have given her a mound of gold, do not take it back (4:20).

4. The Meher should be paid at the time of Nikah, although, with the consent of the woman, the payment could be made later. There is a verse in Surah Al-Baqarah which states that if you divorce a

woman before you have even touched her, and her Meher had been fixed, you are required to give a half of it to her (2:237). It is clear from this verse, that a situation where Meher has not been paid at the time of Nikah, can occur. (See No.6 below).

5. Meher belongs to the woman and nobody has a right to deprive her of it. However, of her own free will the woman can let go a portion of it, or she can forfeit or write off the whole of it. Therefore:

(i) In Surah An-Nisa, it is said, "that women should be paid their Meher willingly, and without a thought of exchange, but if they forego a part of it, then accepting it is lawful for you (4:4).

(ii) In the same Surah it has also been said that a higher or lower Meher could be agreed later, with mutual willingness or with the help of arbitrators or courts.

(iii) Divorce before intimacy, as has been mentioned above, would entail paying half the Meher but the woman, or her appointed spokesperson, or a relevant court, could forgive it as well (2:237).

6. In a rare situation in which the Meher has not been agreed upon, then it should be fixed according to the man's income and affordability (2:236).

#### 4. Strained Relationship

Marriage depends upon a pleasant relationship. Sometimes, however, circumstances can create a strained relationship between a husband and wife. The Quran tries its utmost to each such strain so as not to let the relationship break.

1. One way in which relations can become strained is that in an angry mood, a man may call his wife by a name, which he may later regret. For instance, in his anger he may call her his mother, but after his anger subsides, he regrets it immensely. In Arabic, such name calling is called Zahar. In fact The Quran says that such frivolous swears do not mean anything. These should not be taken in the real sense of the word and it should not mean that your married life has come to an end.

*Allah does not hold you, over your unrealistic or frivolous swearing (2:225).*

At another place, The Quran says: Your wife does not become your mother just because you have said so (33:4), although it does ask Momins to refrain from all kinds of frivolous indecencies (33:3). These include the kind of swearing mentioned before. Since this unrestrained anger in which a person says such insane things, pollutes the pleasant atmosphere at home, it has to be stopped. Therefore The Quran has suggested some atonement whereby before resuming conjugal relationship, one should:

(a) Free a slave. This order was meant for those times when the Arab society retained slaves. If one does not have any slaves, then,

(b) One should fast continuously for two months; and

(c) If one is incapable of doing this, then one should feed sixty destitute people. These are limits set by God. (58:4).

2. All the above refers to frivolous swearing when one is in an angry mood, but if a man intentionally swears that he will not go near his wife, then he should be held to it. This is referred to as 'liao' in Arabic, which means curtailing a woman's rights. In such a situation where people have uttered such a swearing, The Quran gives them a period of four months to revert from what they have said. If they do so, then it would not affect their conjugal relationship (2:226), although they will have to give something to break their swear. Normally, this would be either feeding or clothing ten destitute people or else to free one slave. Anyone who is unable to do this should fast for three days (5:89). If he has not reverted within four months, then this would be construed to mean that he wants to break

the relationship with a divorce. Details of the divorce procedure are given later. Also refer to (2:227). All this highlights the fact that the attitude of people who leave their wives dangling by neither resuming conjugal relations nor divorcing them, clearly goes against Quranic education. They should make their decision within four months, following which the divorce procedure should start.

3. Divorce means freeing oneself from the contract of Nikah. Since this contract was made between two willing parties, namely a man and a woman, no body has the right to revoke it, whenever one wants, by just saying "divorce, divorce, divorce". The other person's rights have to be safeguarded, too. That is why The Quran does not leave the decision to an individual. The society is ordered to take up this matter establish an organization which decides on disputed issues. Now a days, this is either called the government, or the court. In this respect The Quran directs:

*If you see a mutual difference, a dispute or opposition or enmity and fear a break between the husband and wife then constitute a board of arbitrators. This board should have one representative from the woman's family, and one from the man's family. This board should seek a reconciliation. If they do so, it is likely that the husband and wife might come together again (4:35).*

4. If the judges can persuade them to come together, then well and good, but if their efforts fail, then obviously they will have to report to the organization that appointed them. This court will decide whether a divorce should become effective and what the conditions should be (these will be mentioned later).

The first verse in Surah At-Talaq (Divorce) reads:

*O Messenger (PBUH), when you divorce your women, then .....(65:1).*

Here the Nabi (PBUH) has been ordered to make divorce effective, and "Tallaqtum" is a plural word. This shows that this is an order for deciding the divorce cases of Muslims, who were in turn, ordered to get their disputed problems resolved by the Nabi (PBUH) (4:65). In the city centre, the Messenger of God (PBUH) used to decide on these matters himself, but in the suburbs and or far off locations, subordinate officers used to arbitrate. The Quran calls them "those among you whom you have to obey or listen to" (4:59). After the death of the Messenger of God (PBUH), his successors (caliphs) were performing this duty. Therefore, in respect of divorce, it is the court that makes the decision and the husband or wife cannot do so individually. The court should announce its decision when the monthly period of the woman expires, because 'Iddat' would be counted from the onwards (65:1). Iddat which normally spans over three monthly periods (2:228), has been explained later.

5. When the couple have been divorced in the prescribed way, then the woman cannot marry anyone else during the period of 'Iddat'. However, if both of them want to reconcile, then the ex-husband can marry her again during this period (2:228). You have seen that during 'Iddat' a woman is restricted from marrying another man, except her former husband.

However, there is no limitation on the man. If he wants, could marry another woman the very next day after the divorce. This is what is meant by this verse:

*In all matters women have their privileges commensurate with their duties. However, men have an advantage over them in this one respect (2:228).*

6. If this divorced couple do not get re-married during the three month period then following the announcement of the completion of the 'Iddat' in the presence of two just witnesses (65:2), the woman is free to marry any other man. This would be called the first divorce. It must also be made quite clear that the former husband and wife could remarry after the period of 'Iddat'.

7. If following their re-marriage after the first divorce the former husband and wife cannot sustain their second married life, so much so that they have to separate again, then this would be counted as their second divorce. If they so wish, they would even be allowed to marry again after the second divorce. However, if they re-marry and divorce again, then this would be their third divorce. In other words, in their married life, the same couple has now reached the status of the third divorce.

After the third divorce, they cannot marry each other again, whether during or after Iddat. This is what the verse (2:229) means. The first two divorces are such that you can keep the same woman after performing all the Nikah formalities, or she can be graciously released from the marriage bond. However, this would not be allowed after the third divorce.

On the other hand, if after the third divorce this woman gets married to another man, and is then either widowed or divorced, then she can thereafter re-marry her former husband (2:230).

8. It should be remembered though, that following the first divorce the man should not have any ill intentions of trapping and pestering that woman again (2:231). On the other hand, if this woman wants to marry her former husband again, then nobody should forbid her from doing so (2:232). She should be free to willingly marry her former husband.

9. Until now the mention of a strained relationship has been in respect of complaints from the husband. At the same time, The Quran instructs you as to what has to be done when the woman has complaints. Surah 'An-Nisa' tells us that if a woman fears revolt or neglect, then the first step should be towards a mutual compromise (4:128). It is obvious that the procedures for reconciliation that was adopted when the wife revolted, has to be resorted to (4:34). That is, appointing arbitrators to help achieve reconciliation.

If the arbitrators fail in their efforts then the couple will have to be separated (4:30), as per the procedures which have already been explained. If the court witnesses that the man wants to keep the marriage but the woman is transgressing then she will have to forfeit something. This has been explained in detail in (2:229).

10. It has been mentioned earlier that 'Meher' is that wealth which a man gives to a woman as a gift. It should normally be paid at the time of Nikah, but if the woman so wishes, she can postpone its payment. As divorce reverses the relationship of marriage, if the 'Meher' has not been paid before, then it should be decided upon at this point. For this Quranic law is:

(A) If woman wants to continue the marriage and man insists on divorce, then nothing should be returned from the Meher (4:20).

(B) If the divorce is decreed before the man has touched the woman, then he has to give one-half of what was fixed as Meher. However, the woman or her attorney may agree to forego something out of it, and the man, too, may decide to pay her the full Meher (2:237).

(C) If divorce has been decreed before the consummation for the marriage, and for some reason the Meher was not fixed, then the man will have to pay according to what he can afford (2:236).

(D) If the reason for the divorce, is a woman's lewd behaviour then a part of the 'Meher' may be withheld (2:19). Obviously, a court would decide on this.

(E) As has been mentioned earlier, if a man wants to keep his marriage going but the woman insists on separation, then a portion of her Meher would stand forfeited (2:229). This, too, would be fixed by a court.

## 5. Iddat

The specified period of time during which a divorced or widowed woman cannot marry is called 'Iddat'. (As it has been stated earlier, during the Iddat period of the first or second divorce she can marry her former husband). This duration of Iddat is as follows:

1. (a) A divorced woman's 'Iddat' is the time spanning her three monthly periods (2:228). This is the reason why the divorce is to be effected after a woman's menstrual cycle is over, so that it is then easy to count the period of Iddat (65:1).

(b) For those women who have had natural menopause, or who due to some illness do not have their monthly periods, the duration of Iddat would be three calendar months instead of three monthly periods (65:4).

(c) A pregnant woman's Iddat is till the birth of her baby (65:4). At the time of the divorce, these women should inform that they are pregnant (2:228).

(d) There is no Iddat for a woman who has been divorced before the consummation of her marriage (33:49).

2. A widow's Iddat is a period of four months and ten days (2:234). There is no separate law for a pregnant widow, but since the Iddat for a divorce is till delivery (65:4), it can be inferred that even a pregnant widow's Iddat will be till the time of childbirth.

3. During Iddat a divorcee's upkeep, board, lodging and maintenance would be the responsibility of her ex-husband, and her lifestyle and standard would be the same as she used to have as a married woman (2:241;65:1;65:7). However, if she has been wayward, then the divorce immediately ends her husband's responsibility (65:1).

4. For a widow, at least one year's maintenance and board and lodging is necessary and should be provided for in the man's will (2:240); but if she goes somewhere else of her own free will, then this would be the end of such a responsibility (2:240).

5. During the period of Iddat Nikah cannot be performed, although there is no restriction on negotiating for it (2:235).

## 6. Inheritance

The economic system which The Quran wants to establish has no room for hoarding wealth or accumulating properties. In this system everyone contributes to the best of his or her ability, and it is then responsibility of the system to cater to the needs of the society and its dependents. However, until such a system gets established (and even when it is established, then whatever a person has), The Quran has given guidelines for the distribution of wealth and properties. Precisely, the guidelines are the following:

1. It is mandatory on everyone to write a will for his or her inheritance. This should cover all the inheritance, and could be for all who are to inherit (2:240). Surah Al-Maida has given detailed directions for the writing of a will. (5:106)

2. Upon death, the debts of the deceased are to be paid first. After that, his inheritance would be divided according to his or her will (4:11-12).

3. If something is still left over after paying the debts and distributing according to the will, or if person dies without making a will, then his inheritance would be divided in accordance with what is written in The Quran. This explains the share belonging to men and women (4:7).

4. The mode of division is that at first the husband's or wife's share is to be separated, followed by

rest of the recipients.

5. If a man dies childless then his wife will get one-fourth of the inheritance. If they have children then the wife gets one-eighth (4:12). Similarly, if a woman dies childless then the husband would get one-half of her inheritance, but if she has children then he would receive one-fourth share (4:12). In case of Kalalah, other directions apply (4:12;4:176), but as this is a technical matter, it is not discussed here.

6. Son's share is equal to twice that of a daughter (girl one-third, boy two-third). If there are two or more than two daughters (and no son) then they all will share two-third. If there is one daughter then she will get half. If the deceased had children then each of his/her parents will get one-sixth. If there are no children and the parents are to inherit, then the mother's share would be one-third, and if there are brothers, then the mother would get one-sixth (4:11).

Note: Only salient features of inheritance have been briefly mentioned here. A lengthily discussion would be required for the details, and this cannot be done here. The division of inheritance is a technical matter which requires a full knowledge of all the directives.

7. The provision concerning the maintenance for a widow for a period of one year, has been mentioned earlier (2:240).

## 7. Progeny

1. Children have been made a source of great attraction for human beings (3:14).

2. However, if humans start resorting to illegal actions for the love of their children, this very same affection then becomes a stumbling block in the fulfillment of the duties enjoined by God. As such, offspring who had been a boon, becomes a bane (8:28). Since the offsprings are connected to humans only in this worldly life (3:14), they cannot help in anyway when it comes to abide by the laws enjoined by God (58:17). Therefore wherever one faces a clash between following God's laws and one's offsprings, then one should forsake children and hold tightly onto God's laws (60:1-40). One has to disassociate with the children who revolt against God's laws. In this respect the example of the son of Noah is significant. His unwholesome actions earned this remark from The Quran:

*He is not from amongst you (11:46-47).*

This does not refer only to children. Even if there is a conflict about siding with one's mother, father, sister, brother, husband or wife or other family members, and following the laws of God, one should always give preference to the latter (9:24).

3. A healthy, strong and normal baby is a gift from God (7:189-190). An intelligent, well spoken, pious and loving child, the one who follows the laws of God and who is broad-minded towards his parents, would be a blessing from God (19:12-14).

During the dark ages humans themselves used to kill their children. Even today, in Australia and may be in some other places, one finds such ancient tribes who kill their children at birth. (The Mothers - Volume II. By Robert Briffault). The Quran sternly forbids this barbaric custom:

*Do not murder your children for fear of poverty (17:31;6:152).*

In Arabic the word 'murder' does not only mean to kill; it also refers to depriving children of good training and education, and exposing them to superstitions and wrong ideas. As civilized countries do not literally kill their children, these laws would imply not suppressing your children's abilities.

Since the dark ages human beings believe that girls are not at par with boys. The Quran itself, informs about the Arabs:

*Whenever anyone of them would get the news that a girl had been born to him, he would be filled with anger and his face would turn black (16:58).*

At another place it has been mentioned:

*They used to bury their daughters alive (81:8).*

(We rejoice today that such barbaric customs do not exist amongst us; but the way we consciously get our daughters married where they die a slow and gradual death due to the maltreatment meted out to them, is this not tantamount to being buried alive)? The Quran forbade this butchering custom. Hence the respected Messenger of God (PBUH) specially used to take a pledge from women for not resorting to this vile custom (60:12).

The Quran says quite clearly that boys and girls are born according to His law. Therefore, it should never be thought of the boys that they are a blessing of God, and that poor girls are a bolt from the blue.

Girls are born to some according to the laws of God and boys are born to some according to His Laws. Some people get both sons and daughters, and some do not get any children (42:49-50).

All this happens under God's law of nature. Therefore, girls should not be thought of as a botheration, and nor should those who do not have any children heave sighs of deprivation.

The nurturing of offspring is the responsibility of both the parents, but in this respect the mother plays a far more important role than the father. The right time for the training of a child is when it is still a baby in his mother's lap. Some psychologists for instance Dr. Adler and Dr. Jung, have specially studied child psychology, and the gist of their research is that whatever a child is going to be when it grows it becomes when still a babe in its mother's lap. Later, education only reinforces the building that has already been made. That is why The Quran has exempted a woman from earning her economical needs, so that she can devote her full time and attention to this basic duty. Mothers who do not perform this duty conscientiously, not only have delinquent children but are guilty of ruining their society; since ruining children, leads to the destruction of society itself.

It should be well understood that for developing the character of children it is absolutely necessary that there is complete congruity and harmony between the husband and wife. In the home which has upheavals between husband and wife, the children can never be trained properly. The Britannica Book of 1956, after citing various different statistics, concludes that those children who become criminals at an early age, are mostly those who have been brought up in an unhappy home with an incongruent and inharmonious family. This makes it quite clear why The Quran emphasizes a completely harmonious marital life.

Being criminals is just one aspect of the whole picture. If we conduct proper research on the idiosyncrasies that are seen in older people, we would find that the basic reason is the unwholesome environment in which they were raised. A mother's weaknesses contribute more to it, and especially if the children have been deprived of her love, or that of both parents, they suffer from complex psychological disorders.

## **8. Nursing a Child (Breast feeding)**

The Quran has not ordained as to how long babies should be breastfed. The circumstances would be the deciding factor in this respect. It has been mentioned, by the way, in Surah Al-Ahqaf that a

mother first keeps the baby in her womb; then breast feeds; and all this takes about two and a half years (42:15). In certain cases, however, the fixing of a period for breast-feeding is a legal necessity. For instance, if a man divorces his wife and she is still breast-feeding the baby, then according to The Quran rearing the baby is the father's responsibility, and if the father dies then it is the responsibility of his inheritors (2:233). It has been directed that if they mutually agree that the child's mother herself should breast-feed the baby, then he would have to pay her. In this situation, the period could be of two years (2:233), but if with mutual consent they want to wean the baby beforehand, then they can also do so (2:233). He can also arrange for a surrogate mother for breast feeding, instead of the real mother (2:233; more in 3:14; 65:6), (The legality of the period can be understood from this example. If a man dies and his widow keeps on breast-feeding the baby, then she can claim compensation through the court from his successors. However, this will be till the child is two years old, and not beyond.

The Quran does not give any directives regarding the custody of the children, when the husband and wife are divorced. This issue would be decided by the court according to the circumstances of each individual case. The guiding principle is to decide who can administer the correct training and education to the children. The emotions of the parents will also have to be taken into consideration. If the husband and wife sever their relationship, it does not mean that they have also broken their emotional link with their children.

## 9. Polygamy (More than one wife)

1. This subject has been kept towards the end, because it is the most important and there is considerable misunderstanding prevalent in our society about it. It is generally accepted and acted upon according, that a Muslim male can marry up to four times, whenever he desires. This idea is completely repugnant to The Quran. In normal circumstances The Quran allows one wife only. If it is not possible to continue with this wife, as has been explained under the heading of 'Divorce', then the man can marry again; but not in her presence. In Surah An-Nisa it says:

*If you want to bring in another wife in place of your first, then you should pay full (dowry) Meher to your first wife, and only then bring in another in her place (4:30).*

This makes it quite clear that the second wife can fill the place vacated by the first, but she cannot come in her presence.

In accordance with The Quran it should be quite clear, that you should not divorce your first wife just because you want to bring in another. The Quran gives specific directives for divorce, which have been mentioned in the chapter titled Talaq (Divorce). Nowhere in this chapter has The Quran allowed you to divorce the first wife, if you want to bring in another wife.

2. We have mentioned above that under normal circumstances The Quran allows one wife only. This presupposes that special circumstances may rise under which you could marry a second time in the presence of your first wife. The Quran itself has explained such circumstances in Surah An-Nisa (4:3).

This verse has four parts and their translations are as follows:

(i) The first part is: And if you fear it will not be possible to find out an equitable solution of the problem of widows and orphans in the society... In Arabic "Yatama" means the children whose fathers have died, as well as those young women who are without husbands. They could be widows or unmarried young women who cannot get husbands. A little further ahead The Quran has used the words "Yatamun-Nisa" with these meanings (4:127).

This verse specifically refers to the circumstances in which you are afraid that you would be unable to fairly address the problem of orphans or women without husbands. In other words, you would not be

able to fulfil justly their needs, which they deserve or have a right to. The meaning of their verse is quite clear. If in a state of emergency (like for instance after a war when a great number of young men have been killed), the conditions in a society are such that there a number of orphaned children and young women are left without husbands, then the law governing marriage to one wife is relaxed temporarily.

(ii) In second part it is said that if such a situation arises: then marry from amongst them those who seem suitable, by twos, threes or fours (as the situation demands).

You marry women you like out of these, and thus absorb them into your family. In case of widows, their children, too, are included. This is the just treatment for them. If this problem can be solved by marrying two wives then marry two; if you can do it with three then marry three; or in the same manner you may marry four.

(iii) That was a social decision. As an individual, the relaxation is allowed to only that person who can do justice to all of them. If he cannot be just, then despite the emergent conditions, he should have one wife only.

With reference to justice, it should be understood that psychologically it is impossible to love each wife equally. No matter how much you want to, you cannot do this type of justice, (What to talk about your first wife who has been your life long companion then this woman whom you are now bringing home not because you hate your wife but because you have to respond to the collective need of society and therefore make her a part of your family) (4:149). But you must do this (4:129), that you should not tilt to one side only, and neglect the other.

(iv) The fourth part is: but if you fear that you will not do justice then marry only one (4:3). Here the word "Tauolu" has two meanings. One 'being unjust', and the other is 'being burdened' by the expenses of too big a family. Therefore when The Quran directs that if you cannot do justice, then keep the principle of one wife, the aim of this directive is firstly not to be unjust to one and secondly not be weighed down too much by the responsibility of looking after two families.

3. The above dissertation makes it quite clear that according to The Quran:

(i) Law allows only one wife at a time. (Monogamy)

(ii) On the other hand, if a society is faced with a state of emergency where too many orphaned children and many women are left without husbands, then to solve such a collective difficulty, one way is to make a temporary exception to the rule of one wife. If it was only the problem of orphan children then other solutions could be considered. But the problem is that of women of marriageable age and these Muslim women cannot marry non-Muslims. They have to be absorbed by Muslim homes. What else can be done other than allowing a family to have more than one wife. It is obvious that this permission is a collective issue and not that of an individual. Only the society can decide whether they have such emergent conditions or not.

(iii) Even in the state of emergency, only that man will be allowed to have more than one wife who

(a) can give just treatment to all of them; and

(b) can afford to justly provide for these families. (In a Quranic society, this would be the responsibility of the society, but until such a system is established, it will remain the responsibility of individuals).

If any one of these conditions is not fulfilled, then the law of one wife will remain in force. If there is no such collective emergency in the society, or even if the state of emergency exists but the man cannot do proper justice or afford to look-after so many family members, then he is not allowed second wife.

These are the extraordinary circumstances under which The Quran allows more than one wife. Otherwise The Quran does not permit the bringing in of a second wife, while the first is already there.

## 10. Concubines

1. Our people do not stop at four wives only. They extend it further. According to our customary religion, besides four wives, a Muslim man can keep innumerable concubines and whenever he wants, he can sell them to someone else. These matters are completely repugnant to The Quran.

*According to The Quran neither a man nor a woman is to be enslaved. To The Quran every human being is to be respected (17:70).*

2. At the advent of Islam, like in the rest of the world, slavery was prevalent among Arabs, too. Prisoners of war were turned into slaves by them. When they embraced Islam, they already had such slaves and concubines in their homes. If Islam had ordered them all out, then there would have been chaos in the society. Hence such laws were established by which they were gradually either free or made part of the family.

Whatever laws The Quran contains about slaves, are intended for these slaves who were already present in society. "Ma Malakat Aimanukum" means those who are already in your possession. This is stated in the past tense, meaning something that has been done before.

All the above concerned slaves and concubines who were already present in the society. For the future, The Quran completely closed the door on slavery. This was how it was done. For prisoners of war, the order was quite clear. The Quran says that after overpowering them: either be gracious to them and let them go, or else take ransom and let them free (47:4).

After this order, the presence of slaves in homes has been completely ruled out. Therefore, the keep of concubines in homes is going blatantly against The Quran.

## [Home](#) **Ayesha's® Age at the time of her marriage**

### *Section 3*

The logic that is usually presented to support the marriage of minors is that the Messenger of Allah (PBUH) married Ayesha® when she was six years old, and that by the time she was nine, she was sent off with him. As this is a very important matter, we thought it proper that the research on this issue be included here. For the first time, it explains a very important and rather crucial fact.

There are a few matters that are unanimously agreed to in our society; that is nobody has any difference of opinion about them. One of these is that Ayesha® was six years old at the time of her Nikah, and that by the time she was nine, she was sent to live with her husband. This misconception is accepted as a fact, to the extent that nobody ever feels the need for any research in this respect. Its foundation is based on those accounts that are in the compilations of "Bokhari", "Tabri" and "Tabqat Ibne Saad" and others. However, one finds in these and other similar history books, such assertions that in fact contradict these accounts. On the contrary, they prove that Ayesha® was much older at the time of her marriage.

Before we analyze this matter in light of historical evidence, it is necessary to understand one or two vital pre-requisites. Firstly, the laws in The Quran concerning marriage and divorce were revealed long after the migration of Nabi Muhammad (PBUH) from Makkah to Madina. Ayesha's® Nikah or sending-off happened either before or during the years of Migration. Therefore it is obvious that it happened before the relevant Quranic laws were revealed. As would be discussed later it was customary among Arabs to negotiate or finalize a proposal before marriage. This was the same as what in our society is called as giving one's word or getting engaged. The Quran mentions Nikah only, it does not mention any promises or engagements. As such, when those historical accounts state that Ayesha's® Nikah was performed at the age of six and she was sent-off at the age of nine, they were according to Arab society, reporting on getting engaged or the proposal being fixed; and 'sending-off' meant marriage. However, the real crucial question as to how old she was at the time of marriage, still remains.

Secondly, Arabs did not have any calendar at that time, so they could not fix the date, day or month and the year of an occasion like we do today. The Hijra year was in fact first recognized in the time of Omer®. Till then they used to fix the time of death or the birth of a person with reference to some special occasions or they referred to the birth of other children. Even in our society, elderly ladies fix or estimate or determine ages in this manner. For example, they will say that when Kangra was struck by an earthquake, Zaid was still a nursing baby and Umar was born three years after Zaid. Even our Messenger of God (PBUH) has been mentioned in history as having been born in Am Alfeel, the 'year of Elephants', which is the time when the governor of Yemen attacked Makkah with an army of elephants. It is obvious, when the time references to events are fixed in this manner, then it would not be surprising if ages varied, not by months, but by years. (Further examples would-be given in this section). Furthermore, if on the occasion of birth you do not mention the month, but just count the year, then when fixing somebody's age the difference of more or less of a year would be quite likely. For instance, if it is said that so and so was born in 1920; then if that person was born in January, the year 1920 should be counted while calculating the age; but if that person was born in December, then the age would be counted from 1921. Therefore for the purpose of estimating time in our history, this phenomenon should be kept in mind.

Thirdly as mentioned above, we started our calendar during the time of Omer® and on a regular basis it was promulgated from the time of Migration (Hijra). Although migration happened in the month of Rabiul Awal, the year of Hijra was counted from Muharram and the whole year was completed. Prior to the Migration, years were counted from the time when the Messenger of God (PBUH) started receiving the Revelation. He was forty years old when he was made the Messenger of God, (PBUH)

and after that he stayed in Makkah for thirteen years. Then he migrated. That is, at the time of Migration he had completed fifty-three years of his age, and the fifty-fourth year had started. If the year of revelation is included, that is the fortieth year of his age, then the time of Migration would be the fifteenth year of the Revelation. On the other hand, if this first year is not included, then it would be the fourteenth year of Revelation. It is necessary to keep these points in mind because they affect the problem under consideration.

(1) "Asad Alghaba" (Vol. IV, p. 377) mentions:

Fatima® was approximately five years older than Ayesha®

Therefore to gauge the year of birth of Ayesha®, we will have to find Fatima's® year of birth.

(2) "Asad Alghaba" quotes again:

Abbas® went to Ali's® place, where he heard Fatima® saying to Ali®, "I am older than you". This prompted Abbas® to say that Fatima® was born when the Quraish were building Kaaba, and Ali® had been born a few years earlier (Vol. IV p. 280).

The same book mentions at another place on (p. 377):

Fatima® was born in the year when Kaaba was being built, and Messenger of God's (PBUH) age was then thirty-five years.

"Tabqat Ibne Saad" (a book) tells us (Vol. VIII, p. 11):

Fatima® is the daughter of Allah's Messenger (PBUH). Her mother is Khadija®, daughter of Khuwailad bin Asad bin Abdul Uza bin Qasa. Fatima® was born to Khadija® during those days when the Quraish (the tribe) were building the "House of God". And this happened five years before revelation.

At another place it says:

Once Abbas® visited Ali's® house. There, Fatima® was saying to Ali® that she was older than him in age. Abbas® informed her, "Look Fatima, you were born during that time when Quraish were building Kaaba and the Messenger of God (PBUH) was thirty-five year old. And listen, Ali® you were born a few years before that" (Vol. VIII, p. 17).

One finds this statement about Fatima's® death in "Isteaab" (a book):

How old was Fatima® at the time of her death? There is difference of opinion. Zubair bin Bakar quoted from Abdullah Bin Alhasan that he was with Hasham Bin Abdulmalik, and Kalbi was there, too. Hasham inquired from Abdullah bin Al-Hasan "O Abu Mohammed, how old was Fatima® daughter of Allah's Messenger (PBUH)?" Abdullah Bin Alhasan replied, "Thirty years". After this Hasham asked Kalbi, "How old was Fatima®?" Kalbi answered, "Thirty-five years". This made Hasham point out to Abdullah Ibne Alhasan, "O Abu Mohammed, listen to what Kalbi is saying" Hasham preferred Kalbi's statement more. This made Abdullah Ibne Alhasan remark, "O leader of the Momins, ask me about my mother, and ask Kalbi about his mother". (Vol. VI, p. 752).

Fatima® died in 11 A.H. If she was thirty years old at that time, then she must have been born five years before the Revelation to the Messenger of Allah (PBUH). (The difference of months should be taken into account).

There is no doubt that, like other incidents, one finds many accounts about Fatima's® age at the time of her death. For example one quotes her age as twenty-four years; another estimates it at a little over

eighteen years. But it appears that the correct estimate is that she was about thirty years old at the time of her death, and that she was born about five years before the Revelation.

This shows that Ayesha® was born when the Messenger of Allah (PBUH) was forty years old, about five years after the birth of Fatima®, meaning the year when he was made the Nabi (PBUH) (Refer to historical account at the end).

(3) If we accept the account that Ayesha's® age was six years at the time of Nikah or engagement as correct, then it would mean that she was born in the fourth year of their calendar. This would be the fourth year after the Revelation or when Messenger of God (PBUH) was forty-four years old. Since the occasion of Nikah (or engagement) is also quoted as having happened in the tenth year of Revelation, this meaning that Messenger of God (PBUH) was fifty at that time. This statement has many reasons to be wrong. For example, Ibne Saad has quoted in "Tabqat" to have said that when the Messenger of Allah (PBUH) sent his proposal for Ayesha® to Abu Bakr®, he replied, "O Messenger of Allah (PBUH), I have already promised her to Mutam Bin Adi Bin Nofil Bin Abd Munaf for his son Jabeer. Therefore, give me enough time to get her back from them" So Abu Bakr® acted accordingly.

If Ayesha® was six year old at that time, then it would mean that she had been engaged to Jabeer at the age of four or five years. One never finds such examples among Arabs, that they would get their four or five year old girls engaged for marriage. Besides, "Bokhari" quotes in (Vol. 2, p. 204):

Ayesha® said, "When verse (54:46) of Surah Al-Qamar (The Moon) was revealed, I was a toddler playing about".

Surah Al-Qamar (The Moon) of the Quran was revealed in 5th year of Revelation Ayesha® must at least have been of such an age at that time, that she knew that these were Quranic verses, and also that she remembered this incident afterwards. If we can imagine the fourth year of Revelation as her year of birth, then in the fifth year she would be a year old. A baby of one year cannot walk or play about much, and neither is it possible for such a small child to remember Quranic verses. Contrary to this, if her year of birth is considered to be the first year of Revelation, then she would be about five or six year old at the time of Surah Al-Qamar's revelation. At that time she would have been about five or six years old; and capable of remembering something about Quranic verses. (In this respect, it is worth noting that account which has been written at the end).

All the accounts written above attempt to explain that Ayesha® was born when the Messenger of Allah (PBUH) was in his fortieth year of age.

(4). The incident that is considered as Nikah or engagement, happened in Shawal (a lunar month) in the tenth year of Revelation, ("Tabqat Ibne Saad" Vol. 8, p. 40) when the Messenger of Allah (PBUH) was fifty years old. As such, if the first year is not counted, this, makes Ayesha's® age approximately ten years at that time. If you count the first year then her age would be eleven. The issue of real importance is of actual marriage and not the engagement, so we should go further.

(5). As regards marriage, consensus of opinion agrees upon its taking place after the Hijra (The Migration). Therefore we should first examine the timing of Migration. How many years did the Nabi (PBUH) stay in Makkah after the Revelation? There are varied accounts about this. One of these states that when the Revelation descended upon him, he was forty-three years old, and he stayed in Makkah for ten years after that.

Another account runs like this:

A person came to Ibne Abbas® and said that the Revelation descended upon the Messenger of Allah (PBUH) for ten years in Makkah, and for ten years in Madina. Ibne Abbas® said, "Who says this? The Revelation descended upon him in Makkah for fifteen years or more".

In another account, however, Ibne Abbas® has also been quoted as saying that he stayed in Makkah for thirteen years. Thus it is generally accepted that the Nabi (PBUH) stayed for thirteen years, and after that he migrated. (Refer to "Tabqat Ibne-Saad" Vols. 1, pp. 333-334; "Tarikh Tabri" Vol. I, p. 54 and 135-36). Per chance, I have in front of me the Urdu translation of these Vols. that were published in Hyderabad Deccan, India. Both these references are from there. The reason for the contradiction that shows up between thirteen and fifteen years, may be because the Messenger of God (PBUH) was fifty-three years old and fifty-fourth had started when he migrated; and he was in his fortieth year when the Revelation commenced. Now if the fortieth year of this age is not counted then the stay of Makkah would be of thirteen years, and the Migration would have commenced by the beginning of the fourteenth year. If the fortieth year is counted then the stay in Makkah would be of fourteen years, and Migration would then happen in the fifteenth year. Most probably Ibne Abbas® was quoting the same in that account. Taking this into consideration, Ayesha® was either thirteen years old at the beginning of Migration; or she might have completed her thirteen years and would be in her fourteenth year; or she might have completed her fourteenth year, and would be in her fifteenth. (Again refer to the account quoted at the end).

(6). Now we have to see how long after the Migration, she got married? According to the general records, at the time of matrimony or engagement Ayesha's® age was six years and at the time of the send-off she was nine years old. Her wedding took place in the month of Shawwal (10th Lunar Month) at Madina. As she got engaged three years before Migration, according to this account she should have married in the first year of Migration, during the month of Shawwal. But this is not true for the following reasons:

a. In "Tabqat Ibne Saad", Ayesha® has told in detail that when the Nabi (PBUH) and Abu Bakr® migrated to Madina, the Nabi (PBUH) left his daughter and Abu Bakr® left his family behind in Makkah. After their resettlement they called them to Madina ("Tabqat", Vol. VIII, p.43).

b. In Bokhari's compilation, Ayesha® is quoted to have said, "When we came to Madina, I had fever and I lost all my hair on my head. Then when my hair started-growing again and become shoulder length we got married. ("Bokhari", Vol. II, p.204).

These assertions show:

(i) Ayesha® remained in Makkah for a while after the Migration. It should be remembered that the Migration occurred during the month of Rabiul Awal (3rd Lunar Month).

(ii) After coming to Madina she lost all her hair from her head, due to her illness.

(iii) After all her hair grew again and became shoulder length, did she get married.

If it is accepted that she was sent off in the first year of Migration in Shawwal, (10th Lunar Month) then it means that the above mentioned incidents happened within eight months. (From Rabiul Awal to Shawwal). If it is accepted that after the Migration, it must have taken her three or four months to come to Madina from Makkah, and she remained sick for a month, then this would leave only three or four months till marriage. It is clear that in this time, new hair cannot grow shoulder length under any circumstances. This is so obvious that even Ainee, "Bokhari's" narrator had stated that her wedding took place seven months after Migration. She was sent off, after the Battle of Badar in Shawwal, 2 A.H. (Ainee's Vol. VIII, p .96).

c. "Istiab", too, has supported this as follows:

The Messenger of God had engaged Ayesha® three years before Migration in Shawal, tenth year of Revelation, and he brought her home eighteen months after Migration in the month of Shawal. (Vol. II, p.744)

d. In "Asad Alghaba" it is stated:

Fatima®, daughter of the Nabi (PBUH) was married four months after Ayesha's® marriage". (Vol. IV, p. 377)

Fatima® got married in Muharram (1st month of Lunar year). Hence the question is in Muharram of which year of Migration? "Bokhari" (Vol. III, p. 8) gives a long narration of it as follows:

Ali® 'cousin of the Nabi (PBUH)' said that he had one (female) camel that he received as his share from the booty of the Battle of Badr, and one more (female) camel that the Messenger of God (PBUH) gave him out of his share. (This constitutes a gift from the bounty of the commander, which is one-fifth of the spoils of war as per Quranic injunctions). I thought I could bring Fatima®, daughter of the Nabi (PBUH) home in marriage. I talked to a goldsmith from the Banu Qainuqah tribe that he should come along with me to get some Azkhar grass. I intended to sell it to the goldsmith, and whatever money I would collect, I would use for the wedding party.

After that it has been described how Hamza®, the Nabi's (PBUH) uncle, ripped open these camel's stomachs, but as this is irrelevant to our purpose, it has not been copied here.

This makes it quite clear that till the Battle of Badr, Ali® had not been married. The Battle of Badr was fought in Ramadhan (9th Lunar month) 2 A.H. Therefore, the earliest his marriage could have taken place, would be in Muharram 3, A.H. ("Asad Alghaba" had erroneously written it as 2 A.H.).

Since Ayesha® got married four months earlier, her marriage could have happened in Shawwal in the second A.H. and not in the first A.H.

(7). The above details explain that Ayesha® was fifteen years old at the time of her marriage if her year of birth is not added; but if it is added then, she would be sixteen years old. This is two years older than she was at the time of Migration.

According to the account from Abbas® which has been quoted earlier, the Messenger of God (PBUH) remained in Makkah for fifteen years after the Revelation. There we tried to explain the discrepancy in the duration of the stay whether it was thirteen or fifteen years. But if the account that the Nabi (PBUH) stayed in Makkah for full fifteen years and migrated in the sixteenth year is taken as literally correct, then this makes Ayesha's® age as seventeen years at the time of marriage. Ibne Abbas® account is supported by "Tabri's" following statement.

"Ibne Abbas® and Ibne Khantalah related that Messenger of God (PBUH) died at the age of sixty-five. ("Tabri" translated in Urdu, Hyderabad, India Vol. I, part III, p. 599). In brief, he became a Nabi at the age of forty, remained in Makkah after that for fifteen years, and thereafter was in Madina for ten years; sixty-five years as a whole".

Besides this evidence, there is another stronger testimony that tells us that Ayesha® was seventeen years old at the time of Migration. As such she was nineteen years old at the time of her sending-off from her house. Asmaa®, daughter of Abu Bakr®, was Ayesha's® elder sister. Sheikh Wali-ud-Din Abi Abdullah Mohammed Bin Abdullah Khatib writes about her in his book (Akmal Fi Asma Ur-Rijal):

Here is Asmaa®, daughter of Abu Bakr Siddique®. She is famous as Zat Al-Nataqain, because the night the Nabi (PBUH) migrated, she tore her scarf into two pieces. She used one piece to tie her tiffin carrier, and the other was used either to fasten the leathered water carrier or as her head-scarf. She is the mother of Abdullah Bin Zubair®, embraced Islam in Makkah. It is stated that at that time only seventeen people had embraced Islam. She was ten years older than Ayesha®. After her son Abdullah Bin Zubair's® dead body, which had been hung on a wooden peg following his murder, was taken down and buried, she died about ten or twenty days later, at the ripe old age of hundred years. It was year seventy-three of Migration (A.H.). Many people have quoted her for the Nabi's (PBUH) customs and historical accounts. (Akmal has been published with Mishkat's Urdu translation. See p.472)

Asmaa® was one hundred years old at the time of her death in the year seventy-three of Migration (A.H.). This tells us that her age at the time of Migration, was twenty seven years. Since Ayesha® was ten years younger than Asmaa®, Ayesha® was approximately nineteen years old at the time of her marriage.

This also conforms what Kalbi said to Hisham Bin Abdul Malik (Ummayad Caliph), that Fatima's® age was thirty-five years. Thus it can be estimated that if Ayesha® was seventeen years old at the time of Migration, then Fatima® would be approximately twenty two years old and nearing thirty-three at the time of her death. If the year of birth and the year of death, too, are added then she would be thirty-five years old.

In any case, the above details explain the fact that Ayesha's® age at the time of her marriage was seventeen years according to some accounts, or nineteen years according to others. It was definitely not less than fifteen or sixteen years. Therefore, all these historical accounts show that she was nine years old at the time of her marriage; that she used to play on the swings with other children; that even after her marriage to the Nabi (PBUH) she used to play with her dolls, are not rational and are hence unacceptable. The Nabi (PBUH) got his own daughters married, and none of them was sent-off as a minor. Fatima® was married off last, and she was at least twenty one or twenty two at that time. This was the marriage age, although Ali®, to whom she was to be married, was present in the house all along.

Finally, it seems prudent that I should repeat once again that important fact about history that I have mentioned many times before. It is a fact we find many conflicting narrations about the same event. For example Tabri himself has all these statements about the age of the Nabi (PBUH) saying that he was sixty years old, sixty-three years old or also that he was sixty-five years old. ("Tabri" Vol. I, part II). Take, for instance, the accounts about Fatima's® death. It has been narrated that she remained alive only three days after the Nabi's (PBUH) death; or one month; or two months; or three months and five days; or four months and some think she lived for six months after his death (The Nabi's (PBUH) biography by Shibli-Vol.1, p. 427). This difference is, nevertheless, of a few days or months, but in the case of Sodah's® (The Nabi's (PBUH) wife) death, Waqdi writes that it happened in 54 A.H.; but Bokhari writes in history that the death occurred during Omer's® period of caliphate, that is before 23 A.H. (The Nabi's (PBUH) biography by Shibli-Vol.1, p. 404). Just see how glaring the difference is.

If these contradictions do not touch a Quranic principle or reflect adversely upon the Nabi's (PBUH) character, then either of the accounts could be acceptable without objection. For example, Sodah's® death whether it happened in 23 A.H.

or 54 A.H. does not affect The Quran or the character of the Nabi (PBUH). But for those accounts and matters that do reflect upon the Nabi (PBUH) or The Quran, utmost care should be taken about them. The principle in this respect should be that anything that goes against The Quran or the character of the Nabi (PBUH) can never be true, no matter how authentic it is regarded by the standards of history. The narrations and statements on historical events cannot reach an absolute level of surety. The Quran in comparison, is a certain evidence, and it is definitely known fact that the Messenger of God (PBUH) never said or did anything that would go against The Quran, or against human honour! Therefore, we should always rate opinions below sterling facts. If we are careful enough about our history then this would save us from many entangling problems in respect of Islam. Importantly, this would also extricate us from unjustified criticism which daily the non-Muslims direct at us, on the basis of these historical narrations. A vital need of the day is that the history of Islam's early phase be reviewed according to the above standards, so that all the false and fabricated narrations that mar the character of Messenger of God (PBUH) and his companions be deleted from the history of Islam. Unfortunately until someone can do that, we should always assert that such accounts are of doubtful authenticity and that more research is needed to ascertain their status.