

## Chapter Four

# **Polygamy**

## **Polygamy as Viewed by the Three Religions**

Polygamy is a very ancient practice in many human societies. It was practiced, often without limitations, in almost all cultures, and was common in many nations: the Israelites, the Arabs, the Indians, the Brahmans, the Zoroastrians, the Athenians, the Chinese, the Babylonians, the Assyrians, the German, and the Saxons.

It was permitted and practiced as well in ancient Egypt and Persia, among the slaves, the Indo-European people as well as the pre-Islamic Arabs. In the *Code of Hammurabi*, although monogamy was the law, exceptions were made to allow a man to take on a second wife or a concubine. It was also accepted and practiced in ancient Egypt, though concubines had no rights and their children were considered illegitimate.

Generally, polygamy was permitted, by various religions, and practiced long before Islam and for many centuries thereafter.

### **Polygamy in Judaism**

The Bible did not condemn polygamy. On the contrary, the Old Testament and Rabbinic writings frequently attested to the legality of polygamy. Many of the Israeli prophets, highly respected by Jews, Christians and Muslims, had more than one wife. Among those, King Sulayman (Solomon) who had 700 wives and 300 concubines (1 King: chapter 11, verse 3). In addition, it is said that King Dawud (David) had many wives and concubines as well (Samuel: chapter 5, verse 13). In

Deuteronomy: chapter 17, verse 17, the king is warned not to multiply wives; later regulations fixed the number at eighteen for a king and four for an ordinary man.<sup>1</sup> The Talmud advises a maximum of 4 wives as Jacob had, according to chapter 51. However, the Old Testament did not mention anything about how to distribute the property of a man among his sons from different wives (Dutainiam: chapter 22, verse 7). The only restriction on polygamy is the ban on taking the wife's sister as a legal wife (Leviticus: chapter 18, verse 18).

Judaism allowed polygamy since nothing concerning its prohibition was stated. On the contrary, the practice of polygamy was stated in the Torah, 'Isu went to Isma'il and added his daughter, sister of Niabut, to his wives.' Concerning Jacob, son of Is-haq, the Torah stated, 'Then he got up at night and took his two wives, two maids and his eleven sons to cross Yabuk pool.'

The philosophy behind the legalization of polygamy is explained in the *Encyclopedia Biblica* as follows, 'The man who owns his wife as a chattel can on the same principle own as many as he pleases, that is to say, as many as he can afford to buy and keep. The Talmudists formulated the rule that no Jew may have more than four wives, but kings may have at most eighteen.'

European Jews continued to practice polygamy until the eleventh century (about four centuries after the advent of Islam), whereas Oriental Jews continued to practice polygamy until they arrived to Israel, where polygamy is illegal under

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<sup>1</sup> Dictionary of the Bible, edited by James Hasting, revised ed. Charles Scribner's Sons, New York, 1963, p. 624.

civil law. However, knowing that religious law overrides civil law in such cases, it was permitted.

Edward Westermarck, an anthropologist and historian, in his scholarly two-volume work *History of Human Marriage* provided evidence through examples from the Bible based on historical facts that polygamy had been permitted and practiced by both Jews and Christians. According to Westermarck: “Among the European Jews polygamy was still practiced during the Middle Ages, and among the Jews living in the Islamic countries it occurs even at the present time. An express prohibition of it was not pronounced until the convening of the Rabbinical Synod at Worms, in the beginning of the eleventh century. This prohibition was originally made for the Jews living in Germany and Northern France, but it was successively adopted in all European countries. Nevertheless, the Jewish Marriage Code retained many provisions which had originated at a time when polygamy was still legally in existence.”

It is worthy to mention that the practice of polygamy can still be found among the Jews living in certain Muslim countries.

### **Polygamy in Christianity**

All Muslims, Christians and Jews believe that Jesus’ (pbuh) prophethood confirmed Moses’. It did not contradict Moses’ mission as is stated in the gospel of Mathew: ‘Do not think that I was sent to demolish the Revelation or the Prophets. I just came to complete not to demolish’. Consequently, Jesus (pbuh) confirmed the former legislations. He (pbuh) had not spoken against polygamy though it was practiced by the Jews of his society. Hence, anything he did not deny is implicitly accepted.

There is no prohibitive statement of polygamy in all gospels; rather, it is stated in the Epistles of Mathew that polygamy is permissible. However, the Bible set no limit to the number of wives and/or concubines a man might take. When Paul was asked about the conditions of credibility for bishops and priests, he said: 'A bishop should have only one woman in marriage.' Consequently, it is understood that unlike clergymen, ordinary people may marry whatever number of women they like. Hence, many early Christians married more than one woman. All Judges had several wives each (Judg. 8:30; 10:45; 12:14). Relying on such a concept, Napoleon I, emperor of the French, got married to another woman in the presence of the Pope who did not object to the marriage. In addition, no Council of the Church in the earliest centuries opposed polygamy, and no obstacle was put in the way of its practice by the kings. In the middle of the sixth century, Diarmait, King of Ireland, had two wives and two concubines. Polygamy was commonly practiced by the Merovingian Kings. Charles the great had two wives and many concubines; and one of his laws implied that polygamy had been known even among priests. In later times, Philip of Hesse and Frederick William II of Prussia contracted bigamous marriages with the sanction of the Lutheran clergy. Luther himself spoke of polygamy with considerable toleration and he was known to have approved the polygamous status of Philip of Hesse. In fact, St. Augustine declared openly that he did not condemn polygamy. There was even a time in 1650 when some of the Christian leaders resolved that every man should be allowed to marry two women. It is also recorded that the German reformers, even so late as the sixteenth century, admitted the

validity of second and third marriages<sup>1</sup>. In fact, it was only after Christianity was revised according to Pauline doctrines that concepts of monogamy were introduced into Christian philosophy. Father Hillman stresses the fact that the Church in Rome banned polygamy in order for it conform to Greco-Roman culture (which prescribed only one legal wife while tolerating concubinage and prostitution). Greece and Rome had evolved an institutionalized form of monogamy in societies where the majority of people were slaves as they could be used freely. Hence, what was termed monogamy in theory was in fact unrestricted polygamy. African Christians often remind their European brothers that the church ban on polygamy is a cultural tradition and not an authentic Christian Law.

As regards the New Testament, Father Eugene Hillman stated in his insightful book *Polygamy Reconsidered*, "Nowhere in the New Testament is there any explicit commandment that marriage should be monogamous or any explicit commandment forbidding polygamy."

Westermarck, in his *History of Human Marriage*, stated, "Considering that monogamy prevailed as the only legitimate form of marriage in Greece and Rome, it cannot be said that Christianity introduced obligatory monogamy in the Western World. Indeed, although the New Testament assumes monogamy as the normal or ideal form of marriage, it does not expressly prohibit polygamy except in the case of a bishop or a deacon. It has been argued that it was not necessary for the first Christian teachers to condemn polygamy because monogamy was the universal rule among

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<sup>1</sup> Hammudah `Abd al-`Ati, *The Family Structure in Isalm*, American Trust Publication, 1977.

people in whose midst it was preached; but this is certainly not true of the Jews, who still both permitted and practiced polygamy at the beginning of the Christian era. Nor can it be said that Christianity introduced monogamy to the Western world, or reinforced it out of respect for women or for social reform. The monogamous orientation of Christianity was probably the product of a religious philosophy that regarded every gratification of the sexual impulse with suspicion as the gravest sin. Moreover, because the main concern of the Church was to save souls by preventing the deadly sin of fornication, the form of marriage was reduced to the simplest possible terms.”

It is worthy noting that in 1531 A.C., the Anabaptists openly preached at Munster that he who wants to be a true Christian must have several wives. In addition, the Mormons are known to regard polygamy as a divine institution.

### **Polygamy in Islam**

The verse which allows polygamy was revealed after the Battle of Uhud, in which many Muslims were killed, leaving widows and orphans for whom due care is a must upon the Muslim survivors.

The Qur’an says,

*[If you fear that you shall not be able to deal justly with the orphans, marry women of your choice, two or three or four; but if you fear that you shall not be able to deal justly (with them), then (marry) only one.]*

(An-Nisa’: 3)

Here we understand that polygamy was permitted after the Battle of Uhud for many reasons:

- Allah wants to discourage situations where a man may marry one of the orphans in an unfair manner. It was after the Battle of Uhud that rich people used to take a large number of women, especially young orphan girls, besides their wives, to be among their women, in return for their support. Allah thus instructs men to spare the orphan girls and seek alternatives among an abundance of other women, for they may have two, three, or four. Stay away from the orphan, and accordingly from any desire to take advantage of her wealth, helplessness, or lack of guardian other than yourself.
- Another interpretation of the previous verse is that Muslim men were told that if they could not do justice to the orphans, they might marry the widows whose children would thus be as their own children. As the number of women was much greater than the number of men, they were permitted to marry even two, three, or four.
- The lack of public funds or state budgets to meet the urgent needs of the increasing number of helpless widows who had lost their supporters and guardians, and who needed providers to take proper care of their material and moral welfare.

Commenting on these reasons, Stern has suggested, "Muhammad (pbuh) by his sanction of polygamy was introducing a regularized type of polygamous marriage to meet the emergency of the situation."

In the pre-Islamic period, polygamy was unrestricted and unlimited. Abu Dawud related in his *Sunan* on the authority of al-Harith ibn Qays that he said, "I embraced Islam while I had eight wives and when I mentioned that to the Prophet (pbuh), he said '*Choose only four of them.*'"

George Sale, in his commentary on the preceding, remarked, "When this verse was sent down from heaven, the greater part of the Arabs had each of them eight to ten wives and they often treated them badly."

The Qur'an, compared to the Bible and pre-Islamic cultures, limits the maximum number of wives to four under strict conditions of treating and supporting the wives equally and justly.

As a matter of fact, polygamy is one of the most prominent aspects of Islam in the eyes of the West. It is a moral human system; moral in the sense that it does not allow man to have sexual intercourse except through a legal contract and public announcement of the marriage and a human system because it honors humankind. Man shelters women, for example, the widowed wives with children can become a part of a new family and not a burden to society. However, through this, man only multiplies his burdens, troubles and responsibilities.

We can also consider it as an emergency exit that is open only in certain circumstances. People's reluctance to polygamy is only based on ignorance and lack of knowledge. Sometimes it can work out very well according to the people involved. Everything requires commitment, dedication and trust.

## **Earlier Prophets and Polygamy**

Prophet Muhammad's (pbuh) polygamous state has always been an issue for criticism among unbelievers whose tendency to fight Islam made them forget that earlier Prophets practiced polygamy long before the advent of Islam. Among the Prophets who practiced polygamy from among the Israelites are:

### **Ibrahim (pbuh)**

Prophet Ibrahim (Abraham, pbuh) had three wives as stated in the Torah and the Gospel:

(a) **Hajar**, the mother of Isma`il (Ishmael, pbuh) who was mentioned in the Torah:

Hajar gave birth to a son of Ibrahim. Ibrahim called him Isma`il.

(b) **Sarah**, the mother of Ishaq (Isaac, pbuh) who was mentioned in the Torah:

Allah said to Ibrahim: do not call your wife Saray but Sara. She will give birth to a boy who will be called Ishaq.

(c) **Qutura**, the mother of Zamran, Baqshan, Muddan, Mudyān, Bashbaq and Shuha, who were mentioned in the Torah:

Then Ibrahim returned and took Qutura in marriage that gave birth to Zamran, Baqshan, Muddan, Mudyān, Bashbaq and Shuha.

## Ya`qub (pbuh)

Prophet Ya`qub (Jacob, pbuh) had four wives:

(a) **Lay'ah**, who gave birth to five sons and a daughter; Ra'ubin, Sham'un, Lawi, Yahudha, Zabulun and Dina.

(b) **Rahil**, who gave birth to two sons; Danan and Yusuf (Joseph, pbuh). The Torah reads,

Allah mentioned Rahil, listened to her and opened her womb. Then she became pregnant and gave birth to a son. She said: Allah removed my shame. She called him Yusuf and asked Allah for another son. Dana is the name of Yusuf's brother, Binyamin.

(c) **Zilfah**, the mother of Jada and Ashir:

When Lay'ah realized that she could not give birth any more, she gave Zilfah, her maid, to Ya`qub in marriage. Then the latter gave birth to Jada and Ashir.

(d) **Balihad**, the mother of Naftali, Rahil's maid, who was given to Ya`qub in marriage by Rahil:

Then Ya`qub married Rahil. After she had become pregnant, she gave birth to Naftali.

## Musa (pbuh)

Prophet Musa (Moses, pbuh) had three wives:

(a) **Safurah**, who was one of the girls whose flocks Musa watered. He (pbuh) married her and she gave birth to Jarshum.

(b) **The Kushian woman**, who was also mentioned in the Torah:

Maryam and Harun talked with each other about the Kushian woman whom Moses got married to.

(c) **The daughter of al-Qeeny**. It was mentioned in the Torah that Musa got married to one of the Qeeny tribe.

### **Dawud (pbuh)**

Prophet Dawud (David, pbuh) had nine wives, among whom were:

(a) **Mikal**, the daughter of Shawul. It was stated in the Torah that Shawul gave Dawud his daughter, Mikal, in marriage.

(b) **Abija**, who was Nabal's wife. According to the Torah, when her husband died, Dawud sent for marrying her. She at once rode on her donkey accompanied by five maids and followed Dawud's messengers. Then she became Dawud's wife.

(c) **Akhinu'am al-Bazra'iliyyah**, about whom the Torah said,

David spent with his two wives: Akhinu'am Al-Bazra'iliyyah and Abija Al-Karbaliyyah, Nabal's wife in Akheesh's house.

(d) **Ma'kah**, the daughter of Tilmey.

(e) **Ajeeth**.

(f) **Abital**.

(g) **Aglah**.

(h) After Dawud (pbuh) had come from Hebron and had become the king of Israel, he adopted a number of maids and wives from Jerusalem as was stated in the Torah:

Dawud also adopted some maids and wives, from Jerusalem after he had come from Hebron. There, he was blessed by sons and daughters. The names of his sons and

daughters who were born in Jerusalem were: Shamsnaw, Shubab, Nathan, Solomon, Yajar, el-Yashuw', Natig, Yafee' al-Yasham', al-Bida' and al-Yaflut.

### **Sulayman (pbuh)**

As for Prophet Sulayman (Solomon, pbuh), it was stated in the Torah that he had seven hundred wives and three hundred concubines:

Solomon had seven hundred wives and three hundred maids (concubines).

## **Why Is Polygamy Permissible in Islam?**

Western women find themselves in a very disgraceful situation when their husbands have mistresses. Neither women benefit from such a situation. They lose their dignity and respect, and the mistress holds an illegitimate position in the life of her lover who puts himself in a very dreadful situation. Furthermore, it is generally a very short affair. Here we can see that polygamy is a much better option than clandestine sexual affairs. Most of the unmarried women would prefer the solution of becoming the second, third or the fourth wife rather than miserable celibacy.

Moreover, sexual promiscuity is governed by lust and selfishness and is free of any responsibility. We are aware of the rapid rise in the incidence of illegitimate births in the West in the last years where teenage pregnancies have become a norm. Besides child abuse, homosexuality and various sexual diseases like herpes and AIDS were linked to sexual promiscuity. In addition, the high incidence of rape in Western society, despite the free practice of promiscuity, illustrates how man still needs to prove his superiority to woman.

The Islamic permission to practice limited polygamy is in line with Islam's realistic view of the nature of man and woman, and of the various social needs, problems, cultural variations and economic necessities. However, it should be understood that the Qur'an is neither exhorting the believers to practice polygamy, nor considering it an ideal. Then, why

is polygamy permissible? A wise writer may answer this question observing: "Monogamy is the food which sustains society; whereas polygamy is the medicine for the diseases of society". There exist places and times in which there are compelling social and moral reasons for polygamy.

The issue of polygamy in Islam cannot be understood apart from community obligations towards orphans and widows. The Qur'an says,

*[If you fear that you shall not be able to deal justly with the orphans, marry women of your choice, two or three or four; but if you fear that you shall not be able to deal justly with them, then only one.]*

(An-Nisa': 3)

Islam allows polygamy as a social necessity for maintaining a non-sheltered woman; such as an old lady, a widow or a divorcee with children provided that the husband can afford maintaining all wives together with their children equally.

Philip Kilbride, an American anthropologist of Roman Catholic heritage, in his book *Plural Marriage for Our Time*, proposes plural marriage as a potential alternative for divorce in many cases in order to limit the impact of divorce on many children since many divorces are caused by extramarital affairs in Western society.

In olden Arabian days, polygamy had another beneficial purpose among the tribes since the power, respect and influence of a tribe depended on the number of its members. The Muslims had a great need for progeny to build up and reinforce the Islamic community. A great legitimate progeny can only be reached in case of a man marrying more than one wife and impregnating all of them.

Polygamy can also be considered as an emergency exit in times when the unbalanced sex ratios become a problem. It is well known that in reality female surplus is a fact of life. It is scientifically proven that males are fewer than females in plants, animals, and all types of living creatures. Accordingly, if each male were to couple with a single female, what would become of the remaining females?

In the U.S. there are at least eight million more women than men. Also in a country like Guinea, there are 122 females for every 100 males. After World War II, there were 7,300,000 more women than men in Germany, among which 3.3 million of them were widows. What should a society do towards such unbalanced sex ratios? Some solutions suggest celibacy, others allow prostitution and homosexuality. While other societies, like most Africans today, regard polygamous marriage as a culturally accepted and socially respected institution. It is interesting to note that in an international youth conference held in Munich in 1948, some participants encouraged polygamy as the only possible solution to the females in such cases.

Again a severe gender crisis is occurring in the black community of Kenya, Tanzania and the United States where one out of every twenty black males dies or is sent to prison before the age of twenty-one. As a result, many black females may become single mothers before the age of twenty. Accordingly, polygamy may be a potential respectable remedy for such a crisis and should not be banned by law, particularly in a society that tolerates prostitution and mistresses.

Abu Musa narrated that the Prophet (pbuh) said,

*"You will see (in the future) one man followed by forty women taking refuge with him and appealing for help because of the scarcity of men and the great number of women."<sup>1</sup>*

There is no doubt that among the goals of the creation of man and woman is to populate the earth by reproduction. Since the fertility period of a man is longer than that of a woman (it may reach 70 years for him while only 50 years for her), why not make use of such a masculine benefit. Rather it is permissible and not obligatory to fulfill such a requirement especially in the case of a husband leaning towards fulfilling his natural desire while his wife does not due to old age or sickness. In such a case, the spouses prefer not to separate because of the long life they spent together. Thus, allowing polygamy keeps the first wife in the shade of marriage while the husband fulfils his fatherhood needs.

Islam came to restrict polygamy by justice and not give a free hand to man's desires. However, in some cases, some men have more lustful needs. One could be married to a woman who has little desire for men, or who is ill or has a long menstruation period. She may not satisfy his instinctual desires. In such a case, the husband cannot help desiring more than one woman. Accordingly, instead of being forced by the urge to resort to any sinful act, Islam permits him to have another wife. However, it must be taken into consideration that sensuality in men and women is condemned in Islam. It is not acceptable to marry frequently in pursuit of merely carnal desires.

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<sup>1</sup> Reported by al-Bukhari.

Polygamy is also considered the only way to increase the population in case the society is lacking new generations or when the old generations are outnumbering the new ones. In 1650, soon after the Peace of Westphalia, when the population had been greatly reduced by the Thirty Years' War, the Frankish Kreistag at Nuremberg passed the resolution that every man should be allowed to marry two women.

In addition to the social necessity, polygamy proves to be economically essential in some cases as well. In some very poor areas, children are a source of additional labor for the earning capacity of the family. To have more children under such situations would require the practice of polygamy. It is for this very reason that Christian missionaries in some African regions justified their permission to local people to practice polygamy without being excommunicated from the church. A researcher has even found, through his studies, that women in such societies not only accept polygamy, but sometimes prefer it.

It is worthy to mention the opinion of Westermarck regarding polygamy in his book *The Future of Marriage in Western Civilization*, "In France, Dr. Le Bon has predicted that European legislation in future will recognize polygamy. A return to polygamy, the natural relationship between the sexes, would remedy many evils: prostitution, venereal diseases, abortion, the misery of illegitimate children, the misfortune of millions of unmarried women, resulting from disproportion between the sexes, adultery and even jealousy since the disregarded wife would find consolation in her being secretly deceived by her husband."

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## **Polygamy is for the sake of woman more than man**

Polygamy will be a way out when the wife is with a physical or psychological chronic disease, disabled, sterile or even imprisoned for a long period. In such cases, a second marriage will be for her welfare as she will be protected and maintained rather than left with no husband. In the case of a sterile wife, a second marriage may fulfill her motherhood needs through being as a second mother for the second wife's children, a desire she cannot fulfill otherwise. Besides, the husband keeps his wife without being deprived of practicing his fatherhood needs.

Furthermore, some women have found in polygamy the advantage to fulfill their physical and emotional needs while giving them more freedom than a monogamous union. It is also an ideal way that allows the woman to pursue her education and build a career when not all of her time is devoted to her husband.

In addition, it may also be in the interest of the second wife to have someone taking care of her. To have a part-time husband, to live under his protection and maintenance, to share love, to establish a family and practice the bliss of motherhood her instinct calls for may be better than living in deprivation as a spinster, widow or divorcee. In the beginning, of course, there is a period of adjustment, but if people are really sincere and allow it for the sake of Allah, then much love can come out of it.

## **Is Polygamy unfair to the first wife?**

Polygamy in Islam is a matter of mutual consent. Thus no woman can be forced to marry a man who is already married. Besides - after what has been elaborated above - the first wife

has the right to stipulate in her marriage contract that her husband is not allowed to marry a second wife; if he doesn't fulfill that, Islam gives her the right to have the marriage dissolved.

In addition, polygamy does not deprive the first wife of any of her rights. She shares her husband with a second wife in order to protect the whole society. Divine Laws always give priorities to the members of society over the single person in an attempt to establish peace, harmony and balance in the Muslim community.

Mass media has spread repulsive feelings towards polygamy. Hence, Western women will tolerate her husband when he commits adultery, but not when he marries another woman. So, unfortunately, taking a second wife even with the free consent of the first one is a violation of the law. On the other hand, cheating on the wife without her knowledge or consent is perfectly legitimate as far as the law is concerned.

I wonder what the legal wisdom behind such a contradiction is.

## **The Legal Status of Polygamy in Islam**

In Islam, polygamy is neither mandatory, nor commendable, but merely permissible. No one who might find this type of experience burdensome should adopt it. We do not deny that many Muslims have abused the license of polygamy. However, the failure is not in the law itself, but in the application of that law which is due to the ill conduct, misunderstanding and ignorance of man that leads him to pamper the new wife while treating the old one unfairly.

Unlike other religions, Islam stipulates certain constraints for practicing polygamy:

- A husband must not have more than four wives at the same time.
- A husband cannot marry a woman and one of her sisters or aunts is at the same time.
- In times when concubinage prevailed, it was forbidden in Islam that a man takes a concubine as a wife when he is already married to a free woman unless his free wife is divorced and completes her waiting period.

A husband having more than one wife must live with all his wives on a par, and observe justice and kindness in terms which he is capable of controlling, namely time, wealth and treatment.

The Qur'an says,

*[Live with them on a footing of kindness and equity.]*

(An-Nisa': 19)

And the Prophet (pbuh) said,

*“The man who has two wives and is inclined towards one of them will come on the Day of Judgment bent to one side.”<sup>1</sup>*

Islam stipulates fairness in polygamy as a vital condition for its practice.

- Moreover, a Muslim man is not allowed to have more than one wife unless he can afford maintaining all of them, their children and all consequent responsibilities equally. A second wife guarantees that her husband maintains her children from other marriages as well as her children from him.
- In addition to the ability of maintenance, a husband should be quite sure of his ability to protect all his wives and children.

It is worthy to mention that a polygamous husband should have an extra quality of wisdom to be able to deal with his wives' natural jealousy. He has to remain aware of any temptation that may lead him to cross the limit of equality among them.

So the misapplication does not mean that the basic principle should be cancelled. It should be noted that the practice of polygamy in many Muslim societies today is much less than the rate of extramarital affairs in the West, which reveals that Muslim men are far more strictly monogamous than Western men are. This is because polygamy in Islam is filled with such strict constraints that discourage its practice unless necessity for it exists. Dr. Mustafa as-Siba`i (may

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<sup>1</sup> Reported by at-Tirmidhi.

Allah have mercy on him) said about the system of polygamy, "Man distributes and lessens his lust to a certain extent, but he multiplies his burdens, troubles and responsibilities to an unlimited extent."

## **Islam Limits the Abuse of Polygamy**

Certain moral exhortations and legal rulings are interpreted as precautions against the abuse of polygamy:

- Islam permits polygamy on condition that husbands can provide fairness in treating and maintaining all their wives. One must be very sure of his ability to be fair before thinking of a second marriage, knowing that a marriage may be second or third or fourth in the temporal sequence, but is still considered a full-fledged contract with the same rights and obligations as the first one.
- Polygamy is unlikely to prevail where marriage and maintenance are costly. One may conclude with Westermarck that all the evidence from the ancient world "would seem to indicate that polygamy was an exception. A multitude of wives is the luxury of a few despotic rulers or mostly wealthy men."
- It may also be pointed out that a considerable portion of the marriage dowry is ordinarily postponed and has to be paid to the wife. Such deferred sum is considered a debt on the husband's side to his wife and has to be paid whether during his lifetime or after his death - apart from her inheritance portion - and not only in case of divorce as some people wrongly think. This can serve as an indirect limitation upon polygamy.

- Islam prohibited the ‘*Mut`ah*’, (temporary) marriage and accepted only the contracts in which the parties intend to live with one another permanently.
- To avoid any resemblance of illicitness, Islam requires the announcement of all marriages, stipulates at least two witnesses to any marriage contract and recommends (the observance of) marriage festivities.
- The purpose of polygamy in Islam is not for the Muslim to be a slave of his desires claiming that he fulfils women’s need of men. Actually, polygamy was legislated to restore balance to the family. This means that a husband who is happy with his good obedient healthy pious wife has no reason for marrying another one as he should put into consideration his wife’s reaction towards a second marriage knowing that Allah has created women with a natural feeling of jealousy. Consequently, a second marriage will most probably have a negative effect on the first wife’s behavior towards her husband who might eventually lose her. As a result, such a greedy husband might lose his perfect wife for the second one who might not be as good as the first. He should rather help the youth who are incapable of getting married by providing enough financial resources to cover their marital expenses.

## **Fairness in Polygamy**

We know that the divine system must be accepted as a whole, so why do wives detest polygamy? This is simply because a wife feels that if her husband were to marry another woman, all of his goodness, affection, and tenderness would be diverted towards the new wife. Therefore, it is only natural for a woman to have negative feelings about the idea of her husband marrying another woman. It may very well be said: Look at this person who married a second wife and neglected his first, or left his children without support and devoted himself to his new wife.

Those who willingly benefit from the conditional permissibility of polygamy ordained by Allah must also observe the fairness that is similarly ordained. A husband having more than one wife must treat all his wives on equal terms and observe justice and kindness in terms which he is capable of controlling, such as time, wealth, etc. The Qur'an says,

*[Live with them on a footing of kindness and equity.]*

(An-Nisa': 19)

The Prophet (pbuh) said,

*“The man who has two wives and is inclined towards one of them will come on the day of judgment bent to one side.”<sup>1</sup>*

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<sup>1</sup> Reported by at-Tirmidhi.

The intended fairness in the context of polygamy is the allocation of equal shares of lodging, time, maintenance, feeding, clothing, assistance in household affairs, treatment, conjugal rights, protection, together with all kinds of emotional needs, such as care, respect, company, and mercy. Even when one of his wives is sick and cannot cope with his rights, he has to respect her share and spend time with her equally as other wives to fulfill her needs of love, care and company. Furthermore, fairness extends to include the attire of the man himself. A polygamous husband should not use personal articles when he is with one of his wives that are of less value than those he uses for the other. For instance, it would not be proper for him to wear clothes made of fine quality material when he is in the company of one, and wear clothes of less quality with the other. Equivalence must be realized not only in her personal effects, but also in those he uses for himself in his wives' presence. Some of the early Muslims were alert enough even to use footwear identical in type, shape, and color in each household. The rationale behind this is that none of the wives may have grounds to tease her fellow wife/wives by saying something like, "my husband is always better looking when he is with me than when he is with you."<sup>1</sup>

On the other hand, while a polygamous husband is required to assure fairness and equality among different wives in material things that fall under control, Allah does not require him to bear equal affection for each, simply because that is beyond his control. Uncontrollable aspects definitely exist, such as peacefulness or passion that one may

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<sup>1</sup> Muhammad Mitwalli as-Sha`rawi, *Ash-Sha`rawi's Interpretation of the Glorious Qur'an*, the *Surah* of an-Nisa', verse 3.

experience with one wife more than with another, and that is both conceivable and acceptable.

It is worthy to mention that the equality referred to in the *Surah* of an-Nisa', verse 3: [*If you fear that you will not be able to deal justly with them then (marry) only one...*] indicates time and wealth division, effects for herself, and effects that the husband uses when he is with one of his wives. If one is not sure of being able to deal justly on such a basis, then he should have only one wife. Whereas, the equality referred to in *Surah* of an-Nisa', verse 129: [*You will never be able to do perfect justice between wives even if it is your ardent desire...*] refers to emotions which no man or woman has control over but which belongs exclusively to Allah's Decree. In his interpretation of the *Surah* of an-Nisa', verse 129, Imam ash-Sha`rawi stated, "Allah has the ultimate knowledge of everything and everyone He created, including of course the emotions that produce inclination, which He embedded into each of us. If Allah wanted to govern our inclinations, He would not have created such emotions. However, Allah sets those inclinations free for the benefit of this universe. And when He set love in human hearts, He knew that it is with love that the world is developed. For example, if it were not for love of exploring secrets that Allah placed within creation, scientists would have not taken the time and effort to research, study, experiment, and bear all the consequent difficulties. Believers are allowed to love or not love whoever they wish, as long as such feelings do not result in injustice.

The Prophet himself (pbuh) begged Allah's pardon for that which was not in his possession; the feelings of love, affection or sympathy which were known to be greater for one of his wives than for the others. Yet, Allah allowed him

to marry a greater number of wives than is allowed to the ordinary Muslim man.

Remarkable in this context is the far extents to which the Prophet (pbuh) reached in treating his wives with equality, even beyond his own physical capacity. A clear example of this was set during his illness, which could have justified settling in the house of one of his wives. However, he used to ask some of his Companions to literally carry him from one house to another in respect of the days allocated for each wife, which means he even used the capacities of other men to make up for the temporal shortage in his own capacity due to illness. Another example is his selection of which wife to accompany him in his travels by lot. Such is fairness in the true sense of the word.

Fairness must also be equally, or even to a greater extent, observed between the children of different wives, as the bond between a man and his children is undoubtedly deeper.

### **Fairness is required even in monogamy**

A Muslim who is not capable of achieving equality should restrict himself to only one wife. Even for the monogamous husband, fairness would still be required from him, for it is improper and unacceptable for a man to neglect his wife. It is reported that a woman once complained to `Umar ibn al-Khattab (may Allah be pleased with him) that her husband was practically deserting her, although he was not married to any other woman. `Umar asked another Companion who was present at that time to judge the case. The Companion decided that the man should spend every fourth night with his wife, based on an analogy with a man who has the maximum of four wives, which would have entitled the complaining woman to one night in every four.

## **Time Division Among Wives**

A polygamous husband should divide his time equally among his wives. Time division is based on the period allocated to sleep or rest. Generally, most professions take up a major portion of the daytime. Thus, a man married to more than one wife should divide the nights among them equally where the daytime is his to earn his living. An exception may be made in case of husbands whose working hours are mainly at night. In such cases, days would be divided among his wives.

A man may divide the nights among his wives by giving one to each wife or based on two or three nights to each. It depends on the number of wives he has and the way he prefers to meet them. However, he should justly calculate the time using the same calendar system with all wives. A day may be measured according to the solar calendar, starting at the *Maghrib* time (the time of sunset and the time of the fourth daily prayer) up until the same *Maghrib* time of the next day. So, if a man wants to rest during daytime, he should do so at the home of his wife with whom he spent the previous night, as it is her right. Similarly, his day meals should be taken at the home of the wife to whom the day belongs. The husband should not allocate time at will but should follow a feasible schedule. He is not allowed to favor some of his wives with extra time for any reason whatsoever unless he compensates that time to the other wives.

It is worthy to mention that children rights to time is considered independent of their mothers' right according to

law. For example, it may be logical for the husband to spend more time in the residences where there are children to be able to fulfill their needs (in a case where one or more wives have children while others do not). However, the correct approach is to limit such visits to short periods which do not require making up and to take the children out of their homes, to parks for instance. Children of different mothers should be treated equally as well.

In addition, equal time division must be made for wives unable to have sex; such as sick women, menstruating women, women in puerperium (the lying-in period), women in *Ihram* (sexual intercourse is not allowed once one has donned clothing for *Umrah* or *Hajj* and made the intention to do one or both of them) and aged women who have passed menopause if they have no desire for sex, unless they decide with their free consent to give up their night. Even insane wives – who are not dangerous – have a right to equal time division according to law. Equal time division is insisted upon in such cases in order to fulfill the wife's emotional and psychological needs for companionship and care.

In case the husband is sick, he is also required, according to the Islamic law, to divide his time equally among his wives as long as they demand it. The Prophet's wife `A'ishah stated that the Prophet (pbuh) visited all of his wives in turn when he was sick. However, when it became difficult for him to move around, he asked them permission to remain at hers.

In case other wives refuse to give the sick husband permission to stay with a specific one of them, he may cast lots in order to choose one of them to stay with, or he may stay away from all of them, if he prefers. Thus, equality among all wives must prevail in either case of company or desertion.

## **Time Rights of a New (Second) Wife**

When an already married man marries a new wife, the Islamic Law allows him an acquaintance period with his new wife of seven consecutive days if she is a virgin and three days if she had married before. In case the new wife's previous marriage was extremely short or unconsummated, or the time between her previous marriage and her re-marriage is great - in such cases - her acquaintance period is as that as a virgin's. This acquaintance period does not require making up for the rest of his wives.

Anas ibn Malik reported, "It's from the *Sunnah* (the Prophet's - pbuh - practice) that if a man marries a virgin, he stays with her for seven days and then divide his time equally after that. And, if he marries a woman who was previously married, not a virgin, he should stay with her for three days then divide his time equally."

However, if the previously married wife requests seven days for herself instead of three, the husband may also do that but he must make up the full time with the other wives.

Abu Bakr ibn al-Harith reported that on the following morning after the Prophet (pbuh) married Umm Salamah, he said to her, "*Do not feel that you are unimportant among your people, for if you wish, I will spend seven days (with you) and spend seven with (each of) the rest of my (other) wives or if you wish, I will spend three days with you and divide the time equally after that.*" However, Umm Salamah replied, "Make it three."

## Making up Time

If a husband leaves his wife's residence for purposes other than work during her day or time (as in the case of prayers), he is not required to make up that time for her provided that he leaves her for a short period of time. However, if this period is long enough or he even spends the night out, then the time must be made up since his absence has deprived her of her right. He may make up the lost time either by being absent from his other wife/wives for a similar period or by choosing a free night for himself and spending it with her, or he could extend her time the next visit he pays her in such a way that the added time matches half the time given to each other wife, thus equalizing the loss.

Visiting a wife during the daytime of her co-wife's turn is allowable for the purposes of socializing, providing provision, visiting the sick...etc. This principle is based upon a report in which `A'ishah, one of the Prophet's (pbuh) wives, said,

*"A day would not pass without Allah's Messenger visiting all of us (his wives), one at a time. He would come close to us and fondle us. And he would continue to visit each one of us until he arrived at the wife whose day it was and there he would pass the night."*<sup>1</sup>

As for visiting a wife during her co-wife's night time, it is not allowed according to scholars except in cases of extreme necessity such as illness. In such a case, the husband is not

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<sup>1</sup> Reported by Abu Dawud.

obliged to make up the time provided the visit is short, or else if he decides to extend his stay; he must compensate the wife whose time was lost.

Ideally, a man's visit to a wife on a co-wife's day should not be a lengthy one whether it takes time during the day or at night time in order to avoid indications of favoritism and jealousy. Thus if the visit lasts for a long period of time, it should be made up.

On the other hand, it is not a condition of equality among wives that a man be forced to isolate himself each night for each wife in a way that no other wife can see him. Anas (may Allah be pleased with him) said, "The Prophet (pbuh) had nine wives at one time. Whenever he divided his time among them, he would not return to the first until nine days had passed. And, all the wives used to gather each night in the house which he was going to."<sup>1</sup>

Moreover, having sex does not require equal time division or making up time due to the fact that physical and emotional preferences do not affect the general principles of equality provided it does not affect just treatment of all wives.

In case the wives are in different countries or cities by the husband's choice, he is still required to divide his time equally among them according to what is possible, whether monthly or weekly, since separation does not cancel any wife's right. If the husband is not able to visit all of his wives for equal periods due to considerations of work or economic limitations, the lost time remains a debt owed to the wife that must be repaid at the first available opportunity.

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<sup>1</sup> Reported by Muslim.

Only if the absent wife refuses to come, when her husband invites her to, her right to time division is lost. The obligation to time division is also dropped due to reasons arising from the wife's side like her traveling to fulfill a personal desire such as work, education, visiting relatives or friends, or for religious reasons such as performing *Umrah*. However, if the husband is the one who sends his wife away on some trip or makes her leave the city for any reason, her right of time division is respected.

## **Residence Rights of Wives**

It is preferable that the polygamous husband provide each wife with separate living quarters in which he visits her. A husband should not put up his wives in the same house unless they agree and the house is divided into separate apartments with separate lodging facilities. It makes no difference whether the house is large or small, if the kitchen, bathroom and other lodging facilities are shared, because living together constitutes a type of hardship on fellow wives due to the natural jealousies, which are likely to arise among them. Furthermore, it should be realized that such arrangements will naturally inhibit the parties involved as far as free expression of affection goes. For some wives may be more affectionate than others, and if no checks are placed on the display of affection in front of less affectionate wives, jealousies are bound to arise. Thus any display of affection on the husband's side will have to be balanced and restrained.

On the other hand, there is no harm in living together in the same house or in the same quarters provided they agree to live together on a basis of understanding and Islamic conduct. However, in all cases, the husband is forbidden to have intercourse with one of his wives in the sight of the other even if they agree. Such an act would be against the spirit of Islam regarding modesty and privacy.

It is also allowed for the husband to have separate living quarters for himself as well as his wives, and have each wife visit him during her respective day and night. This allowance

is possible because a man has the right to move his wife wherever he wishes and if she refuses; her right to division is lost due to her disobedience. In addition, the husband is also allowed to visit some of his wives in their homes and have others visit him in his, as he has the right to house them wherever he sees fit as long as the housing is equitable and benefiting his means. That is, he cannot legally house some of his wives in luxurious housings while lodging others in poor ones. Houses or apartments may vary in size according to the size of the families involved, but not in quality unless the differences in quality are due to a wife's contribution from her own wealth.

## **Spending Rights**

Equality among wives with respect to expenditure and clothing is not obligatory once the polygamous husband has provided each with her necessities. However, the husband should be as just as possible in satisfying the needs of each of his wives. The basic principle of justice as opposed to equality can be more clearly illustrated by the following example. If one wife is big and needs more cloth in order to make a dress than another smaller wife, in such a case, buying what is sufficient for each is all that is required. In cases where tastes differ, as when one wife wants silk while the other one prefers cotton, the relative difference in value has to be made up for the wife who wants less expensive cloth if she wishes.

Personal allowances are not a requirement according to the Islamic Law; however, if the husband decides to give one of his wives an allowance, he should give the others the same. Similarly, gifts should be balanced; even if the husband buys something for one of his wives, such as a piece of jewelry, and the other wife has no desire for the same, he should give her its cost or buy her something else of equal value.

On the other hand, spending on the children is not included in the division of wealth among wives. Hence, it goes without saying that if one wife has more children than the other, the husband must spend more in terms of food and clothing for the larger family.

It can generally be said that moderation in demands has to be maintained if plural marriages are to work among moderate-income spouses. Demanding absolute equality or requiring that the husband make up every minute right can only lead to the destruction of plural marriages. However, if gross injustice exists in any of the previously mentioned areas of rights, the oppressed wife has basically three alternatives:

1. Failing in her own requests for justice, she may ask her parent or guardian to intervene and advise her husband to be just.
2. If the previous attempt fails, the oppressed wife may request that the court judge the case, and if the court finds that the husband has indeed been unjust, he can be ordered to be just. She may, subsequently, request a divorce if the husband refuses to comply to the court orders.
3. She may simply relieve the opposing husband of the obligation of justice if she feels that maintaining the marriage is more important than obtaining her rights.

## **A Polygamous Female!**

All religions agree that the woman is not allowed to be married to more than one husband at the same time. One may wonder why not permit polyandry (plurality of husbands for the same woman)? To answer this we have to remember that the nature of women is physiologically and psychologically different from that of men. Physiologically speaking, the woman is monogamous by nature. It is possible for a man having more than one wife to have sexual relations with all his wives, and impregnate them. But if a wife has more than one husband, she is, even in that case, impregnated only by one. Accordingly, there is no certainty of the paternity of her children, in case of polyandry. That is why a Muslim divorcee or even a widow spends a waiting period before getting married to another man to assure whether or not she is pregnant.

From the physio-sexological viewpoint, the polyandry arrangement would be an anomaly. If we examine the origin and not merely communication of venereal diseases, we find that they originate from a woman being sexually visited by more than one man. If a man has sexual contact with more than one woman but the woman with whom he is having this relationship is not in sexual contact with any other man, venereal diseases would not originate. Thus, if a woman has sexual relations with more than one man, the possibilities of the origination of venereal diseases increase.

That's why the woman needs a waiting period after being divorced or widowed since it was reported that the woman develops antibodies against foreign semen antigen in the vagina (semen different from that her body is used to, i.e. of present husband) in case she gets married to another man during this period. Her body needs time until the previous antigen level of previous husband is reduced so that her body becomes ready for receiving new foreign seminal fluid. Scientists proved that this period equals the woman's waiting period legislated in Islam.

Another problem for a woman to have more than one husband is that looking after one husband is considered to be enough trouble without bringing upon herself more than one.

## **Polygamy or Promiscuity?**

A Western writer insisted that no Christian on his deathbed could confess to the priest that he had not had intercourse with a woman other than his wife, at least once in his life. Such promiscuity of the West is commonly practiced without a law to forbid it. It does not take place in the name of marriage but in the name of friendship and concubinage. It is not limited to only four, but extends to fulfill all unlimited desires of a man. It is not announced in order to be celebrated by the family, but happens secretly without anyone knowing about it. In addition, it does not make incumbent on the doer any financial responsibility towards the woman he has an affair with, and who in most cases is left alone to scandal and poverty while enduring the troubles of pregnancy and delivery. Besides, he is not committed to recognize the offspring resulting from such affairs. They are considered illegitimate, bearing the stigma of being bastard children, and remain unrecognized by society as long as they live.

Such promiscuity being unforbidden by law, is considered legal, but is not called 'polygamy'. It is void of any moral behavior, awakening sensibility or human feeling. It is only directed by lust and selfishness.

On the other hand, polygamy permitted in Islam is limited to only four wives under strict conditions of fairness and equality and requires an essential reason for it. All second marriages are announced, celebrated and have the same weight and rights as the first one. The offspring resulting are considered legitimate and have full rights of maintenance, support and inheritance.

## **Islam Limits Promiscuity**

In the West, sexual relations outside marriage are theoretically considered a sin or at least are undesirable. However, practically speaking, no legal steps whatsoever are taken to reduce the very high incidence of pre-marital and extra-marital sexual relations, in spite of the high rates of illegitimacy and venereal disease. On the contrary, mass media encourages such relations and presents it as normal affairs. Contraception and abortion are expected to conveniently get rid of any undesirable side effects of this way of life.

In contrast with this uncontrolled situation, Islam advocates a number of specific measures to reduce the temptations towards sex outside marriage, hence limits promiscuity.

Islam regards marriage as guardian of desires and its only legitimate and permissible outlet. Early marriages are encouraged to protect one's chastity. It was narrated on behalf of the Prophet (pbuh) that "*Speeding things is not advisable in Islam except in two things; a virgin getting married and a dead getting buried.*"

The Prophet (pbuh) advises all people to get married if they could afford marriage expenses so that their natural desires have a legitimate and legal fulfillment.

Abdullah (may Allah be pleased with him) narrated, "We were with the Prophet (pbuh) while we were young and had no

wealth whatsoever. So Allah's Messenger (pbuh) said, '*O Young people! Whoever among you can marry, should marry, because it helps him lower his gaze and guard his chastity (i.e. preserves his sexual parts from committing adultery). And whoever is not able to marry, should fast, as fasting diminishes his sexual desire.*'"<sup>1</sup>

Almighty Allah says,

*[They are garments for you while you are garments for them]*

(Al-Baqarah: 187)

It tells how husband and wife should, like garments, cover and protect each other; how they may find fulfillment in each other in their erotic urges, in their desire for children and in mutual exchange of love and tenderness.

Sexual relations outside marriage are considered not only as a sin but also as a crime that is punishable under the Islamic Law. The punishment for it - unlike the actual Egyptian Law which gives penalty to the woman only a period of 3 years in jail and not to the man - applies equally to man and woman and is severe and deterrent in its effect.

Due to the permission for polygamy, the problem of excess single women will not exist in society. Women are directed in the Qur'an when they appear in public to cover themselves in a modest type of dress so as not to attract men.

The Islamic way of life excludes the boy-friend/girl-friend relationship, mixed dancing parties between men and women, taking alcohol or drugs, and other reasons providing the situation from which promiscuity develop. The Glorious Qur'an forbids the boy-friend/girl-friend relationship as in the following command:

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<sup>1</sup> Reported by al-Bukhari.

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*[They should be chaste, not lustful, nor taking paramours (illegal relations between men and women).]*

(An-Nisa': 25)

Since sight is considered to provide the easiest access to the heart and the key to its being overcome with desires, lowering the gaze was set as a Divine Command that applies to both males and females equally. Allah, the Almighty, says,

*[Say to the believing men that they should lower their gaze and guard their modesty; that will make for greater purity for them, and God is Well-Acquainted with all that they do. And say to the believing women that they should lower their gaze and guard their modesty; that they should not display their beauty and ornaments except what (must ordinarily) appear.]*

(An-Nur: 30-31)

Such Divine Commandment is a way of protection, as is scientifically explained regarding how eye-to-eye contact can transfer one's feelings and desires to the other. Lowering the gaze comes prior to that of guarding one's modesty since looking is considered the messenger of adultery as Satan uses it to encourage further illicit consequences. For this reason it was said, "Beware of the look, for it plants desire in the heart and it is a strong temptation."<sup>1</sup>

Mixing between men and women at different gatherings, religious or otherwise, is legitimate in Islam, yet it is limited to certain right circumstances and for good reasons.

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<sup>1</sup> For more details, see Magda Amer, *The Wisdom behind Lowering the Gaze*, Al-Falah Foundation, 2003. (An E-Book version is also available on Dr. Magda Amer's website).

## **The Wisdom Behind Prophet Muhammad's (pbuh) Polygamous State**

The Prophet's marriages are always used by the enemies of Islam as a weapon to repudiate the authenticity of such a great Religion and Messenger.

Traditions fourteen centuries ago differ from traditions of today. The concept and view of marriage has changed a lot, and this has encouraged skeptics to condemn the plural marriage of the Prophet (pbuh) and Companions. Polygamy and marriage at a very early age was a predominant tradition at that time. A girl must be engaged by the age of twelve, otherwise she will be considered a problem that requires a solution.

The harsh conditions of the tribal environment in the Arab peninsula added to the necessity of early marriages. It was a very primitive life, where marriage was a means to strengthen the bonds between the tribes and a way to enhance mutual relations.

Let us exhibit some facts regarding the Prophet's (pbuh) marriages:

- Until the age of twenty-five, the Prophet (pbuh) remained single. Most tribes welcomed his affinity for his noble lineage, unparalleled good manners and youth.
- Prophet Muhammad's (pbuh) first marriage was to Lady Khadijah (may Allah be pleased with her) when he (pbuh)

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was about 25 years old. She was about fifteen years older than him. She was a widow and had children. Their marriage and love lasted for about 25 years. During that period, the Prophet (pbuh) did not marry any other woman. She was the love of his life and remained in his heart throughout his life. That is reflected in the incident when he heard a voice that resembled Khadijah's voice, many years after her death; he was thrilled to imagine it was Lady Khadijah's voice.

- He (pbuh) used to give Lady Khadijah's friends special treatment and care even after her death. One day, while walking with his Companions, he saw an old woman; he gave her his seat and remained talking with her for long. When asked why he did so, he replied that she was a friend of Lady Khadijah. When Lady `A'ishah (may Allah be pleased with her) wondered how the Prophet (pbuh) still remembered Khadijah, who was an old lady, while Allah had given him a younger one instead, he (pbuh) replied, "*No one is better than her*". And he kept on mentioning her noble traits and how she made laborious efforts to support him at the time when the fights against the Prophet (pbuh) and his message were at its peak in Mecca, before emigration to Medina.
- From the age of fifty till the age of fifty-two, the Prophet (pbuh) remained single grieving the death of Lady Khadijah.
- From the age of fifty-two till the age of sixty, the Prophet (pbuh) married a number of women for social and political reasons, as is revealed later.

- From the age of sixty till the age of sixty-three, Almighty Allah forbade him to marry any other woman:

*[It is not lawful for you (to marry other) women after this, nor to change them for other wives even though their beauty attracts you, except those (captives or slaves) whom your right hand possesses. And Allah is Ever a Watcher over all things]*

(Al-Ahzab: 52)

### **Reasons behind the Prophet's multiple marriages**

We can summarize the reasons of the Prophet's (pbuh) multiple marriages in the following points:

#### **1. Educational reason:**

The Prophet (pbuh) wanted to educate the Muslim women about the new regulations and rules of Islam, especially regarding hygiene and feminine issues. He was of a tremendous bashful nature which inhibited him from describing those private matters to women publicly. The method was that he educated his wives regarding those issues so that his wives would go and spread this knowledge to other women.

The wives of the Prophet (pbuh) shouldered the great responsibility of transferring such important knowledge and legislation of hygienic issues to the whole Muslim nation, a responsibility that could not be carried out by one woman only.

In addition to this special type of rules, the narration of prophetic *hadiths* was another responsibility put on his wives' shoulders to document and convey to people. Living with the Prophet (pbuh) in the same house is a tremendous experience

to learn from his life style and manners, and to talk and narrate his sayings and commands.

His manners at home and with his family were a model to all men - how he used to help in the house, clean, buy things from the market, sew his clothes, etc. He never beat or insulted anybody, neither a woman nor man throughout his life except in fighting to raise the Word of Allah.

## **2. Legislative reason:**

The Prophet's (pbuh) marriage to Lady Zaynab bint Jahsh is an example of that. Prior to revelation, adoption was widely spread among Arabs at the time. It was a full adoption where the title of the family is given to the adopted person and he was considered a legal son of the family, the system that Islam prohibits. Islam allows adoption but without the adopted child inheriting the family name. The adopted child must know that he is not a legal son of the family. Yet he's provided with all kinds of care and interest exactly as the biological son.

The Prophet (pbuh) adopted a son called Zayd ibn Haritha. Zayd was married to Zaynab bint Jahsh for some time, and then they had to divorce. A divine order from Allah to His Prophet made him marry Lady Zaynab. It was prohibited by Islam for a father to marry the woman whom his 'adopted son' divorced. This command of Allah to His Prophet (pbuh) to marry Lady Zaynab, put an end to treating the adopted son as a legal son as was the tradition prevalent there at the time. Zayd was now not to be treated as a legal biological son but as an adopted one, and the difference, hence, is highlighted and made clear to all people.

### **3. Social reason:**

The Prophet's (pbuh) also meant to bring the hearts closer and strengthen the social bonds. That was exhibited in the Prophet's (pbuh) marriage to Lady `A'ishah, the daughter of his closest and dearest friend Abu Bakr (may Allah be pleased with all of them). He also married Lady Hafsa, the daughter of the second best Companion and Caliph, `Umar ibn al-Khattab (may Allah be pleased with him).

Such marriages were intended to honor these two great Companions. The same reason that made the Prophet (pbuh) give Lady Fatima, his beloved daughter, in marriage to `Ali ibn Abi Talib, and two of his daughters to `Uthman ibn `Affan (may Allah be pleased with all of them) – when the first daughter died, the Prophet (pbuh) married him to his other daughter as an honor to him. It was an act to show the great appreciation and reward of the Prophet (pbuh) to his four close Companions.

### **4. Political reason:**

The Prophet's (pbuh) polygamy was also to strengthen the bonds between the different tribes, as political affiliation was a reason for some of the Prophet's (pbuh) marriages.

- a) That was exhibited in his marriage to Lady Juwayriyah bint al-Harith, the honored Lady of the Banu al-Mustalaq tribe. She was captured as a war captive along with her family. She came to the Prophet (pbuh) asking for financial help. He (pbuh) proposed to her and she accepted. Accordingly, the Muslims set free all the captives of her tribe as they became the in-laws of Allah's Messenger. When the tribe experienced this noble treatment of Muslims, they all declared their

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embracing Islam and uttered the *Shahadah* of Islam (testimony of faith).

- b) His marriage to Lady Safiyyah bint Huyayy ibn Akhtab (may Allah be pleased with her). She was a Jewish lady, taken as a war captive after her husband's death in the battle of Khaybar. The Prophet (pbuh) offered her two options: either to choose to marry him or to be set free and return to her family. She chose to marry the Prophet (pbuh) and embraced Islam of her free consent.
- c) His marriage to Lady Umm Habibah (may Allah be pleased with her), the daughter of Abu Sufyan (then, most dangerous enemy of Islam). She entered Islam at an early stage of *Da`wah* and immigrated with her husband to Abyssinia where he died. The Prophet (pbuh), upon knowledge of that news, sent her a message proposing marriage. She was very happy and when she returned, they were married. After learning of the news, Abu Sufyan's heart started to lean towards the Prophet (pbuh) and his daughter whom he had not seen for a long time. His enmity towards the Prophet decreased. He did not deny that the Prophet (pbuh) was the best choice for his daughter and the best of men, and he declared his daughter secured and best treated with him.

## 5. Supporting old widows and their children:

Some marriages of the Prophet (pbuh) were to very old widows who needed to be maintained emotionally and financially, such as:

- a) His marriage to Lady Sawdah bint Zam`ah, a fifty-five-year old widow of as-Sakran.

- b) His marriage to Lady Zaynab bint Khuzaymah, a sixty-year old widow of `Ubaydah ibn al-Harith.

## **6. A Prophetic tradition:**

The polygamous state of Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) was no more unconventional than the polygamous state of Prophets prior to him (pbuh). Prophets Musa, Dawud and Sulayman each had more than one wife and a number of concubines. Yet, no doubt, they were the most pious among people. The vilification of Prophet Muhammad's (pbuh) polygamous state by those opposed to Islam stands unmerited.

## **Was the Prophet's Polygamous State Out of Lust?**

Some people accuse the Messenger of Allah (pbuh) that he married various women out of carnality. And the answer to this is as follows:

1. It is natural and instinctive for the man to have passion for women. We realize that most of the wives of the Prophet of Allah (pbuh) were not virgins; they were either divorced or widowed. So if the Prophet (pbuh) was seeking the satisfaction of a lustful desire he would have chosen the best virgins. He would have been welcomed to marry the best women since all tribes were seeking to build a blood relation with him through marriage due to his noble lineage and refined manners which distinguished him. And he was the one who recommended choosing a virgin as a wife in many of his sayings. Jabir ibn `Abdullah (may Allah be pleased with him) was reported to have said, "The Prophet (pbuh) asked me, *'Have you married, Jabir?'* I said, 'Yes.' He asked, *'A virgin or a previously married woman?'* I said, 'A previously married woman.' He said, *'Why not a virgin who you would play with and she with you, and who you would laugh with and she with you?'* I said, `Abdullah (referring to his father) died and left daughters, and I was not in favor of bringing them an equal. So, I married a woman who can take care of them.' So he said, *'May Allah bless you.'*"<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Reported by al-Bukhari.

2. His first wife Lady Khadijah bint Khuwayled (may Allah be pleased with her) was a widow with kids and she was fifteen years older than the Prophet (pbuh). In spite of the fact that polygamy at that time was common in the Arab peninsula, the Prophet (pbuh) did not get married to any other woman at the time of his marriage to her, which lasted for a period of twenty-five years.
3. After Lady Khadijah had passed away, the Prophet (pbuh) remained single for two years out of agony over her death.
4. The memory of Lady Khadijah in his mind was so vivid throughout the Prophet's (pbuh) life, which proves his great appreciation to feelings, and intimate love relations between a husband and a wife.
5. The Prophet (pbuh) refused the proposal of the tribe of Quraysh to marry any woman he chooses in return of forsaking his Prophetic Message for the Worship of the One God and stop attacking their gods and beliefs.
6. The Prophet (pbuh) married all his wives after Lady Khadijah at an age of over fifty.
7. He (pbuh) let his wives choose between accepting the poor tough life with him or get a divorce. So if his marriage to them was out of lust or sexual desires, he could have kept them with him and wouldn't choose to forsake any of them.

## **Characteristics of Prophet Muhammad's Polygamous State**

- Allah, the All-Mighty, allowed His Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) the exception of marrying more than four wives at the same time, a condition forbidden for all other Muslims.
- The Prophet (pbuh) was forbidden to divorce any of his wives, replace one by another, replace them by other women or add other wives to them.

*[It is not lawful for you (to marry other) women after this, nor to change them for other wives even though their beauty attracts you, except those (captives or slaves) whom your right hand possesses. And Allah is Ever a Watcher over all things.]*

(Al-Ahzab: 52)

### **The wisdom behind this is as follows:**

1. The Prophet's wives were of a special status and unparalleled honor since the Glorious Qur'an considered them: 'Mothers of Believers'

*[The Prophet is closer to the believers than their own selves, and his wives are their (believers') mothers (as regards respect and marriage).]*

(Al-Ahzab: 6)

2. The Prophet's wives were banned from marriage after the Prophet's death.

*[And it is not (right) for you that you should annoy Allah's Messenger, nor that you should ever marry his wives after him (his death). Verily! With Allah that shall be an enormity.]*

(Al-Ahzab: 53)

Consequently, if the Prophet (pbuh) had divorced any of his wives, she would have remained the rest of her life deprived of marriage, in addition to excluding her from belonging to the Prophethood home. Such a situation would have been an unwarranted punishment.

3. If the Prophet (pbuh) was to choose only four from among his wives to remain with him and divorce the rest, he (pbuh) would have deprived the divorced ones from the honored status of being among 'the mothers of believers'. In addition, such a choice would have meant his preference of some of them to the others, or that one of them could replace another which was not true. We can never say that any of the Prophet's wives excelled the other. Each one of them had a special independent personality, distinguished role and aspects of excellence. Their roles were complementary and not competitive. Certainly, all of them deserved the honor of being 'mothers of believers'.