

Question for Monday January 4, 2016

Why Muslim women cannot marry Jews and Christians?

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After the “Dr Younos Show” of December 26, 2015, a young Muslim Afghan girl from the State of Virginia called and asked me why she cannot marry a Jew or Christian? She requested her answer in English.

Eversince, we migrated to Western countries due to the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979, this question has surfaced frequently among young Muslim Afghan girls (as well as among other Muslims). I responded to this question in September of last year on my Face-book page in Farsi, but the questioner asked me to respond in English.

Before I answer to this question from a religious point of view (*not* contemporary thinking of liberalism or secularism), I would like to draw the attention of the reader about to the status of Christians and Jews as mentioned in the Qur'an. The Qur'an address the Christians and Jews as “People of the Book.” This is because they received revelation from God Almighty and they have scriptures. The Qur'an never calls them polytheists and infidels. However, the Qur'an warns them of not following the true path of monotheism. Dr Yusuf Al Qardawi in “*Al-Halal Wal Haram Fil Islam*” (The Lawful and the Prohibited in Islam, 1994) writes, “It [The Qur'an] looks upon the People of the Book, that is the Jews and Christians, with special regard, whether reside in a Muslim country or outside it. The Qur'an never addresses them without saying, “O People of the Book” or “O you who have been given the book,” indicating that they were originally people of a revealed religion. For this reason, there exists a relationship of mercy and spiritual kinship between them and the Muslims, all having in common the principles of the one true religion sent by Allah through His prophets (peace be on them all).” (p.336). For this reason, Muslims revere and respect all Prophets of God according to the Qur'an.

From an Islamic sociological point of view, marriage is a process of exogamy. This means a woman leaves her home and enters her husband's home. According to the Bible, a woman has to obey her husband unconditionally. The Bible says, “Submit yourselves unto your husbands as unto the Lord” (Bible of King James: Ephesians 5:25). In New American Standard Bible uses the phrase “subject to your husband.” According to Islam women do not submit to husbands or become a subject to the husband. Although women are referred to as being obedient (*Kaneteen*), given that the husband is obedient to God. The Qur'an says “Women are clothing to men and men are clothing to women” (Qur'an, 2:187). This means they are equal to each other. They complement each other. In another verse the Qur'an says, women have rights over their husbands and husbands have rights over their wives. (Qur'an, 2:228). Again, the Qur'an make them equal to each other, although the assumed responsibility of leadership is given to the man, again assuming the he follows the commandments of God. While in the Bible submission to husband is equated to the “Lord” and it is unconditional.

Secondly, wedlock in Christianity is a sacred matrimony while in Islam it is a social contract nothing else. Any time either party cannot fulfill the required obligations, they can seek divorce, although this is the last resolve after failing to reach a proper agreement between the two.

The third reason is that Muslims acknowledge all prophets of God from Adam to Muhammad (peace be upon them all) while Jews and Christians do not acknowledge Muhammad. This means that they cut off the chain of Prophethood. When a woman acknowledges all prophets and her husband does not this cause clashes within family.

The fourth reason is that because women are subject to husbands according to the Bible, women have

to change their family name and adopt their husband's family name (although this is not a stated requirement and many Christian women maintain their family names). In Islam, a woman has a stated right to keep her own last name because protection of cultural identity and family identity is very important in Islam.

The fifth reason is that according to the Qur'an, Islam is the final message of God on earth. This means with the coming of Muhammad (peace be upon him) the message from God to mankind has been completed. In this regard, a woman who has grown up in a complete monotheistic family atmosphere marries a Jew or Christian, she shares a family atmosphere wherein there is not a true monotheistic family atmosphere according to Islam. Trinity is a case in point that the Qur'an rejects. Islam is a religion of progression not regression.

The sixth reason is that Islam is way of life not just a belief in God alone. This means that a Muslim lifestyle must correspond to the laws of the Qur'an and the tradition of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him). If a woman enters a non-Muslim home, she enters in a home that rejects her religion entirely whereas the highest priority in a Muslim's life is to follow the commandment of God and to adhere to the principle of Islam. Nothing else, marriage and husband's wishes included, takes precedence.

The seventh reason is that in Judaism a man can marry their near kin. For example, a Jewish man can have sexual relationship with his niece. According to the Torah, "One of the most notable features of all the lists is that sexual activity between a man and his own daughter is not explicitly forbidden, although the first relation mentioned after the Levitical prohibition of sex with "near kin" is that of "thy father." (Wikipedia, viewed December 30, 2015). According the Qur'an, Islam has forbidden incest and is very clear on this issue. (Please see the Qur'an 4:23).

The eighth reason is cultural differences. A husband may demand things that may not suit cultural principles of his wife. It is for this reason that the Prophet of Islam said you marry within your own religion. (Please see Sahih Bukhari, volume 7, Book of wedlock, chapter 16, page 17; Eng. Trans. By Muhammad Muhsin Khan).

The ninth reason is the role of a husband in a Muslim home is to raise a Muslim child according to Islam, and to abandon all those things that are forbidden in Islam within the family such as drinking, gambling and so on. This would not be the case in a non-Muslim home, and a Muslim woman's child may not have the greatest gift of God, as being brought up as a Muslim.

The last but not the least, in our discussion is the suffering of Muslim parents. They know what their daughter is doing is wrong. I have been working with Afghan Muslim families as a Cultural Family Counselor for over twenty years. They truly suffer when their daughter who does not have any clue about Islam force her parents to accept her marriage. Parents are averse to accepting it from their understanding of Islam. Moreover, they lose their dignity and integrity within the community. Some even disown their daughter when she commits to such an illegal marriage. For a true Muslim the most important thing in life is his/her religion, not education, wealth, social status and so on. Therefore, why would a woman not ask the non-Muslim suitor to study Islam first, and why would he not do so seriously if he truly loves the girl? The underlying problem is that, even very educated people, don't bother to study Islam, and by not doing so, they degrade their personalities, lifestyles and families. All Muslim girls should know that there is no such thing as "Muslim-secular." Either one is a Muslim respecting all values and principles of Islam or not.

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