

The Quran and its Message

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Salamun Alaikum (Peace be upon you)

DOES THE QURAN CONFINE WIDOWS TO THEIR HOMES IN THEIR WAITING PERIOD (IDDAT)?

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Many Muslim clerics assert that after the death of a husband (an already traumatic period), the widow must stay confined in her home for a specified period as part of Shariah. Rulings are imparted as to what is considered a 'boundary' of the home which often includes the garden.

Quite apart from the fact that no such requirement is stipulated in the Quran, furthermore, an aggressive rendering of a verse dealing with a completely different context is almost abused.

065.001

"O Prophet! When you divorce women, divorce them at their prescribed periods, and count (accurately), their prescribed periods: And fear God your Lord: **and do not expel them out of their houses, nor should they leave, except in case they are guilty of some open lewdness (Arabic: bifahishatin)**, those are limits set by God: and any who transgresses the limits of God, then certainly does wrong to his (own) soul: You don't know, perhaps God will bring about thereafter a new situation"

The verse above specifically deals with the complex matter of **divorce** and instructs husbands not to turn out their wives from their marital homes after divorce has been pronounced and the Quranic legal period of waiting (iddat) has ensued.

Exception is given only in cases where the divorced wife resorts to behaviour which amounts to a transgression (Fahisha). 'Fahisha' is anything which is considered evil, an excess, an enormity, immoderate, beyond measure or an excessive sin. Therefore an action which is gross, lewd or obscene is also 'Fahisha'. Furthermore, this excess can also apply to speech or language (as in uttering foul, evil, lewd or obscene speech). Please note how 'fahishatu' is used to insinuate an excess (as in slander or scandalous speech) in verse 24:19.

The verse 65:1 above clearly protects the interests of both parties and in particular, allows for a period of separation within the marital home where both parties treat each other with respect and with further reconciliatory hope (2:228). Unfortunately, aggressive renderings by some Muslim clerics suggest unwarranted interpretations of this verse.

Many interpret this as the women's incapacity to leave the home for any purpose whatsoever relying solely on [Islamic secondary sources](#). This is completely unwarranted from the Quranic text.

Furthermore, to apply this aggressive rendering of almost incarceration to the context of widowed women is further from the truth. Verse 65:4 dealing with divorced women has absolutely no connection with widowed women.

There is usually an unwarranted implication that 'Iddat' (which simply means a period of reckoning, a count, a term or prescribed term) will also apply to widowed women to determine what may be in their wombs.

Given that the two waiting periods dealing with divorce (3 months / 3 cycles) and spousal death (4 months and 10 days - Verse 2:234) are different, this clearly implies that the wait is simply not a function of what may be apparent in the wombs of women. Rather, this must have a wider reasoning.

Given today's modern technology, and even with women who biologically have regular menstrual cycles, the status of a possible pregnancy can easily be determined. Hence the waiting periods would also have aspects of reconciliation, cooling off, stabilising and a mourning period as opposed to it simply being a determining factor of what may be present in the wombs of potential mothers.

The Quran, in fact, does not even make use of the term 'iddat' when describing the waiting period of four months and ten days in verse 2:234 for widows. The term used is 'tarabbasna' which is best rendered as 'a general waiting'

There are different 'iddats' noted in the Quran which address different situations:

- To denote the number of fasting days (ma'dudatin - 2:184)
- To denote the number of months in a year as being 12, four of them being sacred (iddata - 9:36)
- The unknown number of sleepers in the cave conjectured by some (iddatihim - 18:22)
- To denote the number of angels as wardens over the fire and their number as a trial for the disbelievers (iddatahum - 74:31)

With regards women specifically, the following 'iddats' are noted:

- No 'iddat' (Arabic: iddatin) period when women are divorced without marriage consummation (33:49)
- An 'iddat' (Arabic: iddatahunna) period as 3 regular months for divorced women whose periods cannot be determined, such as women who despair of their cycles, e.g. menopausal

women and those who do not, or have not menstruated for whatever reason (65:4). Please also see related article below.

- An 'iddat' (Arabic: iddatahunna / ajaluhunna) period of a child bearing divorced woman till the end of the term when her baby is delivered. (65:4)

None of the above situations refer to confining women to their homes.

FINAL THOUGHTS

'Iddat' is simply a waiting period specified for specific circumstances. None of these circumstances even so much as insinuate the need to confine or almost incarcerate women in their homes.

Related Article:

- (1) [Does Verse 65:4 Provide Consent to Consummate a Marriage with Female Minors?](#)

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