

The Quran and its Message

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Salamun Alaikum (Peace be upon you)

MARRIAGE WITH THE PEOPLE OF THE BOOK

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It is not uncommon to note Muslim men cite that they have been granted permission to marry women from the People of the Book, often implying an exclusive gender right that they possess as virtue of being Muslim men. As we will note, these beliefs may often appear to be devoid of Quranic context and responsibility.

Two main areas will be briefly discussed from a Quran's perspective:

- (1) Muslim men marrying women from 'People of the Book' (Jewish and Christian women)
- (2) Muslim women marrying men from 'People of the Book' (Jewish and Christian men).

(1) MUSLIM MEN MARRYING WOMEN FROM 'PEOPLE OF THE BOOK'

The Quranic verse used to cite support for this type of marriage is the following:

005:005

"This day (all) the good things are made lawful for you; and the food of those who have been given the Book is lawful for you and your food is lawful for them; and the chaste women **(Arabic: muh-sanatu)** from among the believers and the chaste women **(Arabic: muh-sanatu)** from among those who have been given the Book before you (are lawful for you); when you have given them their bridal due (taking them in marriage), not fornicating nor taking them for secret concubines; and whoever denies faith, his work indeed is of no account, and in the hereafter he shall be one of the losers"

The right for such a marriage is clearly granted by the Quran. However, the immediate context is 7th century Arabia and therefore, it is imperative that we first understand what is meant by 'muh-sanatu' in its immediate context and any other relevant information in the verse. This is imperative

to ascertain as this requirement has been cited as a precursor to any legitimate entitlement to wedlock as well as the intention for honest wedlock (Not for fornication or secret concubines).

UNDERSTANDING 'MUH-SANATU'

The word is formed from its root 'HA-SAAD-NUN' and its derivatives have been utilised numerous times in the Quran. The word '*muhsin*' from the verb used in this verse (*ahsana*) implies to guard or those who intend to remain chaste and decent. This remains significant as the root meaning carries the implication of fortification or to be fortified.

The word generally implies a sense of protection, fortification, guarding against unlawfulness and in keeping with good taste, remaining restrained, good, virtuous, to act beautifully or in a manner that is righteous and chaste. This arguably widens into a broader rendition of how one conducts themselves with a view to remain wholesome in their general approach and protection against that which is considered unlawful.

حَصَانٌ (Ṣ, Mgh, Mṣb, Ḳ) and حَاصِنٌ (Ṣ, Mgh, Ḳ) and حَاصِنَةٌ (Ḳ) and حَصْنًا (Ṣ, Ḳ) and مُحَصَّنَةٌ (Th, Ṣ, Mgh, Mṣb, Ḳ) and مُحَصَّنَةٌ (Th, Ṣ, Mṣb, Ḳ,) applied to a woman, Continent, or chaste; or abstaining from what is not lawful nor decorous, (Th, Ṣ, Mgh, Mṣb, Ḳ,) or from that which induces suspicion or evil opinion: (Sh and TA in explanation of the first of these epithets :) or

Source: Edward Lanes Lexicon [1]

It is arguable that if such conscientiousness towards right conduct in guarding oneself has been emphasized by the Quran as a pre-requisite for marriage, that a belief which is so incongruent with Islam's teachings would **not** remain acceptable.

Therefore, beliefs which entail **Trinitarian beliefs** or the attribution of partners to God (*shirk*) are arguably precepts more fundamental to consider when considering marriage. After all, the expression '*waman yakfur bil-imani*' (And whoever denies faith) in verse 5:5 also clearly implies correct, righteous faith and not one steeped in idolatry (*shirk*) or even disbelief (*kufr*). [1]

It is clear from the Quran, that there were Christians who did not accept these beliefs, yet still remained committed to their Gospels which do not prima facie teach such theological concepts.

005.077

"Say: "O people of the Book! do not exceed in your religion the bounds (of what is proper), trespassing beyond the truth, nor follow the vain desires of people who went wrong in times gone by, who misled many, and strayed (themselves) from the even way."

005.073

They do blaspheme who say: God is '**Third of three**' (Arabic: **Thalithu thalathatin**): for there is no god except One God. If they desist not from their word (of blasphemy), verily a grievous penalty will befall the blasphemers among them.

003:113-114

"Not all of them are alike: Of the People of the Book are a portion that stand: They rehearse the verses of God all night long, and they prostrate themselves in adoration. They believe in God and the Last Day; **they enjoin what is right, and forbid what is wrong; and they hasten in good deeds:** They are in the ranks of the righteous"

Therefore, before such a marriage can be legitimised, it is important not only to ascertain moral virtuousness, but also intrinsic beliefs when applied to the understanding of the nature of God.

Therefore, '*mu-sanatu*' are arguably those People of the Book, that despite remaining virtuous, chaste and followed their own laws, believed in the veracity of the Quran's truth. This is strongly suggested by verse 5:5 where the food of the believers are made lawful to the People of the Book and vice versa. The fact that the food of the believers has been made lawful to the People of the Book carries two significant points.

(1) Two separate laws are recognised.

(2) This directive only means anything if the People of the Book accept the veracity of the Quran. Therefore, this is most likely a reference to 'believing' Jews and Christians.

It is also important to appreciate the fact that as food of the People of the Book has been made lawful to the believers, this clearly implies that food which is good / wholesome and clearly in line with Jewish law and is '*kosher*'. The Quran sanctions the kosher practices of the ancient Jews from the era of the Quran's revelations. It is worth considering whether today's kosher laws are completely in line with ancient Jewish practice, much in the same way as if today's '*halal*' methods are in line with the requirements of the Quran's stipulations.

Please see related articles [2] and [3] below.

(2) MUSLIM WOMEN MARRYING MEN FROM 'PEOPLE OF THE BOOK'

Contrary to popular Muslim belief, the Quran does not forbid this marriage. However, nor do we find any explicit mention of the Quran sanctioning it. There is complete Quranic silence on the matter.

There is much wisdom with any Quranic silence on a particular issue and much can be inferred with regards this type of marriage.

It is important to note however, that the Quran is explicit when it wants to forbid a certain type of marriage. We note this in the following verse dealing with marriages with idolaters.

002:221

"And do not marry idolatresses unless they believe; a believing bondwoman is better than an idolatress, even if she pleases you. And do not give (your women) in marriage to idolatrous men, unless they believe and a believing bondman is better than an idolater, even if he pleases you. These invite to the Fire, while God invites to Paradise and forgiveness, as He wills. And He makes clear His revelations for the people so that they may take heed"

As can be seen from the above verse, the Quran remains explicit when it wants to categorically prohibit a matter. No such prohibition is found with Muslim women marrying '*muh-sanatu*' (good, virtuous - both moral and arguably, in belief) men of the Book.

FINAL THOUGHTS

Marriage between Muslim men and women from the Book is clearly sanctioned by the Quran with clear provisos. The term '*muh-sanatu*' has been discussed in this context.

'*Muh-sanatu*' clearly refers to virtuousness both morally and arguably, those in line with Quranic beliefs. This most likely **excludes** Trinitarian Christians for the purposes of wedlock. In such a case, the truth of the Quran should be discussed in as much detail as possible to ascertain whether the veracity of the Quran is acceptable in truth and not simply as a lip service for the purposes of marriage. God knows the matters of the heart and any compromised acceptance of the truth remains only a blight on one's own soul.

There is Quranic silence on marriages between righteous men of the People of the Book and between Muslim women. The Quran neither sanctions such a marriage, nor does it prohibit it as in the case of verse 2:221 with regards marriages with idolaters.

Whether this has been left to the ever changing landscapes of societies, conditions, circumstances and on a case by case basis can be argued in light of the Quranic silence. It is important to remember that women of 7th century Arabia had very different circumstances to deal with as do the women of for example today, where they enjoy far more autonomy and independence. However, many aspects have to be considered and any marriage is a solemn contract between a man and a woman which needs to have ratification before marriage with the consent of both parties. Pressures of such a marriage and the implication on children must be seriously considered [4]. In such a case, all the provisos of ascertaining '*muh-sanatu*' would still apply.

With regards food, we note a powerful verse with regards making lawful or unlawful matters which are not ordained by scripture. General wisdom from this verse is quite pertinent and apt here.

016.116

"And (do) not say for any false thing that your tongues assert, "This is lawful, and this is forbidden," so as to ascribe / invent false things to God. For those who ascribe false things to God, will never prosper.

The Quran and its narratives must first be understood in its own context, its audience and the environment that it was first being delivered. Only then can the most effective guidance be extracted for mankind.

Related Articles:

- (1) [Understanding 'Kufr' \(Disbelief\) from a Quranic Perspective](#)
- (2) [Is Kosher Meat Permissible for Consumption?](#)
- (3) [Slaughtering of Animals - The Correct Method of Sacrifice](#)
- (4) [Nikaah - The Contract of Marriage](#)
- (5) [People of the Book \(Jews & Christians\)](#)

REFERENCES

[1] LANE. E.W, *Edward Lanes Lexicon, Williams and Norgate 1863; Librairie du Liban Beirut-Lebanon 1968, Volume 2, Page 587*

Highlights marked in red on the lexicon excerpt are my own insertions. They have no bearing on the original text other than they emphasise relevance to the topic at hand. These are merely illustrations and have solely been utilised for educational and explanatory purposes.

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