

The Koran on Women

The Koran is the holy book of Islam. Composed of 114 Suras, or chapters, this book sets forth acceptable conduct for people of the Muslim faith. Muslims believe that the Koran is the word of God as revealed by the angel Gabriel to the Prophet Mohammed. Mohammed's visions came to him while in the cities of Makkah and Madinah, which are located in the country that we know today as Saudi Arabia. Makkah was the birthplace of Mohammed; Madinah holds the tomb of the Prophet. As a result, these are the two holiest cities to Muslims; infidels or "nonbelievers" are not allowed within the city limits. Few Westerners realize the supreme and unquestioned power to Muslims of the words of Prophet Mohammed. Each aspect of their lives is guided by the Koran, believed sacred by Muslims. Although there are many Westerners raised as Christians who scoff at the possibility of a higher being, it is a rare Muslim who does not cling fiercely to an unshakable faith in the God of Mohammed.

In the Muslim world of Saudi Arabia, there is no separation of religion and state as we find in the West. The Islamic religion is absolute law.

During the ten years that I lived in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, I asked a close Saudi friend to translate and explain certain verses of the Koran. After observing the total segregation of the sexes in Islam, I was particularly interested in the verses that restrict the behavior of women.

Since the verses were translated to me in the context of personal conversations, there may be minor discrepancies between my interpretations and those of Koran scholars. However, in view of the fact that the Koran is thought "untranslatable," and

much controversy exists over many English translations, I feel confident in revealing the following verses on the subject of women that were read to me directly from an Arabic version of the Koran. Also, bear in mind that there are many verses in the Koran which urge the protection of women and children.

I encourage readers to read the entire Koran for themselves as these verses to follow are only concerned with the segregation of men and women and do not provide a full knowledge of the Koran.

SUBJECT

Sexual relations during the month of Ramadan, when every good Muslim fasts and abstains from pleasures during the daylight hours.

ACTUAL VERSE FROM THE KORAN:

SURA II, 187

Complete your fast

til the night appears,

But do not associate

with your wives

While you are in seclusion

or in the Mosques.

These are limits God has set

signs to Men; that

They may learn self-restraint.

Permitted to you,

On the night of the fasts,

Is the approach of your wives.

They are your garments.

SUBJECT

Marriage of Muslims to nonbelievers. The Koran states the same set of rules for both male and female; the law is upheld only against females. Many Saudi men marry Christians, but Saudi women are strictly forbidden from marrying non-Muslims.

ACTUAL VERSE FROM THE KORAN:

SURA II, 221

Do not marry

women who do not believe,

Until they believe.

A slave woman who believes

is better than one who does not believe.

Do not marry your daughters

to unbelievers until

they believe.

A man slave who believes

is better than an unbeliever.

SUBJECT

Sexual relations during a woman's menstruation, which are strictly prohibited.

ACTUAL VERSE FROM THE KORAN:

SURA II, 222

They ask,

concerning women's courses,

Respond: They are

a hurt and a pollution,

Keep away from women

in their courses, and do not

approach them until they are clean.

But when they have purified themselves,

You may approach them

in any manner, time, or place

Ordained for you, by God.

SUBJECT

After a man divorces a woman, he must ensure that she does not carry his child. If the woman is pregnant, she must be cared for by the husband.

ACTUAL VERSE FROM THE KORAN:

SURA II, 228

Divorced women shall

wait, concerning themselves

For three monthly periods.

It is not lawful for them

to hide what God has created

in their wombs.

Their husbands have the right

to take them back, in that time

of reconciliation.

And women have the rights

similar to the rights,

Against them, according to

what is equitable;

But men have more rights

and power over them,

For God is most powerful

and wise.

SUBJECT

After a man divorces a woman, he may remarry her if she has married and divorced another man since. If he divorces her a second time, he is forbidden from marrying her again.

ACTUAL VERSE FROM THE KORAN:

SURA II, 229

*A divorce is permissible
two times only. After that, The parties should hold together
on agreeable terms,
Or separate with kindness.*

SURA II, 230

*If a husband divorces
his wife, He cannot,
after that, remarry her
until she has married
another husband, and he
has divorced her.*

SURA II, 241

*For divorced women
a reasonable maintenance
should be provided.*

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SUBJECT

The number of women that a man may marry and instructions to present them with a dowry are explained in the following verse.

ACTUAL VERSE FROM THE KORAN:

SURA III, 3

Marry women of your choice,

Two, or three, or four;

But if you fear that you shall not

be able to deal justly,

Then take only one woman

or a captive

That your right hand possess,

That will be more suitable

to prevent you

from doing injustice.

Upon marriage, give the women

their dower, as a free gift;

but if they of their own good

pleasure remit any part of it

back to you,

Then take it and enjoy it

with good cheer.

SUBJECT

The inheritance for children is explained below. Male children are to receive twice what female children are given.

ACTUAL VERSE FROM THE KORAN:

SURA IV, 11

*God directs you as regards to
your children. The male shall
receive a portion equal to that
of two females.*

SUBJECT

Specific instructions are given on what to do with women who break the law against sex crimes. A second verse speaks of the action to be taken against men under similar circumstances.

ACTUAL VERSE FROM THE KORAN:

SURA IV, 15

*If any of your women
are guilty of lewdness,
Take the evidence of four
witnesses from amongst you,*

*Against them; and if they testify,
confine them to houses until
Death do claim them.*

SURA IV, 16

*If two men among you
are guilty of lewdness,
Punish them both.
If they repent and amend,
Leave them alone.*

SUBJECT

The Koran specifically names women who are forbidden to men for marriage.

ACTUAL VERSE FROM THE KORAN:

SURA IV, 22

*Marry not women
whom your fathers married.*

SURA IV, 23

*Prohibited to you are:
Your mothers; daughters;
sisters; father's sisters;*

*mother's sisters; brother's
daughters; sister's daughters;
step-daughters under you; those
who have been married to your
sons; and two sisters in wedlock
at one and the same time. (If you
divorce one sister then you may
marry the other.)*

SURA IV, 24

*Also prohibited are women that
are already married.*

SUBJECT

A Muslim man may not go to God with his prayers if he has touched a woman. There is a special verse advising him what to do if he has touched a woman and there is no water to wash.

ACTUAL VERSE FROM THE KORAN:

SURA C, 43

*Or if you have been
in contact with women,
and you can find no water,
Then take for yourselves*

*sand from the earth,
And rub therewith
your face and hands.*

SUBJECT

Sex crimes are crimes against God. Serious punishment is reserved for those who commit such acts.

ACTUAL VERSE FROM THE KORAN:

SURA XXIV, 2

*The woman and the man
guilty of adultery or fornication,
flog each of them with a hundred stripes,
Let not compassion move you
in their case, in a matter
prescribed by God.*

SURA XXIV, 3

*No man guilty of adultery or fornication
marry but a woman similarly guilty, or an
unbeliever, Nor let a woman marry anyone
but a man similarly guilty, or an unbeliever.*

SUBJECT

The charge of fornication or adultery is of such a serious nature that four witnesses must be produced.

ACTUAL VERSE FROM THE KORAN:

SURA XXIV, 4

*And those who launch
a charge against chaste women
and produce not four witnesses,
[To support their allegations]
Flog them [the accuser] with eighty stripes;
And reject their evidence
ever after, for such men
are wicked transgressors.*

SUBJECT

If a man accuses his wife of adultery or fornication, and has no witnesses to support his allegations, he must swear by the name of God that he is speaking the truth.

ACTUAL VERSE FROM THE KORAN:

SURA XXIV, 6

*And for those who launch
a charge against their spouses*

and have no evidence but their own,

Their solitary evidence

[can be received]

if they bear witness four times

[With an oath] by God,

That they are solemnly

telling the Truth

SURA XXIV, 7

And the fifth [oath]

that they solemnly invoke,

The curse of God, on themselves

if they tell a lie.

SUBJECT

Muslim women in Saudi Arabia cover their faces or subject themselves to great harassment by the men of religion. The segregation of the sexes is absolute in all walks of life.

ACTUAL VERSE FROM THE KORAN:

SURA XXIV, 31

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.
Therefore, they should draw their veils
over their bosoms and not display
their beauty except to their husbands,
their fathers, their husbands' fathers,
their sons, their husbands' sons, their
brothers or their brothers' sons, or their
sisters' sons, or their women, or the
slaves they possess, or male servants
who are free of physical needs,
or small children who have no sense
of shame of sex.*

SUBJECT

The Koran states that a woman who is elderly may lay aside her outer garments (veil, abaaya). In fact, women of Arabia never stop veiling, regardless of their age.

ACTUAL VERSE FROM THE KORAN:

SURA XXIV, 60

*Such elderly women that are
past the prospect of marriage,
there is no blame on them,*

*If they lay aside their outer garments,
Provided they make not a wanton display
of their beauty; but it is best for
them to be modest.*