



132479 - The reason why the `iddah of a woman whose husband has died is longer than that of a woman who has been divorced

the question

What is the reason for the `iddah of a woman whose husband has died being longer than that of a woman who has been divorced?

Detailed answer

Praise be to Allah.

Allah, may He be Exalted, has enjoined the `iddah on women who have been divorced and those whose husbands have died, in the verses in which He, may He be Exalted, says:

{Divorced women should wait concerning themselves for three menstrual cycles} [Al-Baqarah 2:228]

{If any of you die and leave widows behind, they should refrain from marrying again for four months and ten days} [Al-Baqarah 2:234].

What the Muslim must do is hear and obey, and submit to the texts of revelation and the rulings of Islam, even if he does not know the wisdom behind them. Allah, may He be Exalted, says:

{But no, by your Lord, they will not [truly] believe until they make you [O Muhammad] judge in all disputes between them, then find in their hearts no reservations about your verdicts, but accept them wholeheartedly} [An-Nisa' 4:65]

{The only response of the believers, when they are called to Allah and His Messenger so that he may judge between them, is to say: We hear and we obey. It is they who will be the successful ones} [An-Nur 24:51]



{It is not fitting for any believing man or believing woman, when Allah and His Messenger have decided concerning a matter, to have any choice in that matter } [Al-Ahzab 33:36].

This does not mean that we cannot discuss the reason for the rulings. The scholars (may Allah have mercy on them) have mentioned several reasons for the `iddah, including the following:

1. Worshipping Allah by obeying His command, as He has enjoined this on believing women.
2. Establishing that there is no pregnancy, so that there will be no mixing of lineages.
3. Giving the couple the opportunity, in the case of divorce, to resume married life by the husband taking his wife back.
4. Highlighting how serious the matter of marriage is, as the procedure of divorce cannot take place except after a long wait; were it not for that, marriage would become like a plaything of children, as it would be done and then undone within a short time.
5. Expressing grief and mourning after the death of the husband, in recognition and acknowledgement of the husband's kindness and favours.

The `iddah is longer for the woman whose husband has died for the following reasons:

1. The separation has a greater impact in the case of death, because it is not by choice, so the time needed to express faithfulness is longer.
2. The `iddah for the woman whose husband has died is connected to the time required for the foetus to clearly begin to move, so as to protect the lineage of the dead. In the case of divorce, the time for establishing that there is no pregnancy is based on indefinite indications, because the man who issued the divorce knows the situation of his divorced wife, and whether she is pure or menstruating, and whether he had been intimate with her before he divorced her or not, unlike one who is deceased. The ten days were added to the four months to allow more time for the foetus to move, so as to be on the safe side, because the strength of foetal movements varies.
3. The grief and distress is greater and lasts beyond three menstrual cycles. So the absence of pregnancy may be established within that period, but establishing that there is no longer any grief and distress in the woman may require more time than that.



4. If the widow hastens to remarry, it may upset the husband's family and lead to people gossiping about the woman and saying that she should not be so eager to remarry and what is appropriate for the widow is to show loyalty to the husband and mourn for him.
5. If the divorced woman gives birth, the husband may reject her claim and deny the child through the process of li'an, but this is not possible in the case of the deceased. Therefore it is not completely impossible for the woman to give birth to a child and attribute it to the deceased. This is why the `iddah is imposed on the woman whose husband has died, as a precaution. Moreover, this waiting period is short compared to the duration of the `iddah that was imposed on widows during the Jahiliyyah. Shaykh Ibn `Uthaymin (may Allah have mercy on him) said in *Ash-Sharh al-Mumti` `ala Zad al-Mustaqni`* (13/348-349): The wisdom behind it being four months and ten days – and Allah knows best – is that it is protecting the rights of the first husband. That is because the Prophet's rights over his wives was so great that they became prohibited for marriage to his ummah for the rest of their lives. But in the case of others, four months and ten days is sufficient. But why is it four months and ten days?

The answer is that four months is one third of the year, and ten days is one third of the month. It says in the hadith, "One third, and one third is a lot." During the Jahiliyyah, women would remain for a year in the worst accommodation; a small tent would be set up in the house for the widow, and she would remain there night and day, not washing or cleaning herself. She would remain like that for a whole year, with summer and winter passing her by. Then when she came out, they would bring a bird or a chicken and the like to her and she would wipe herself with it, then she would come out of that filthy, stinking tent, pick up a piece of dung from the ground and throw it, as if she were saying by her actions: all that has happened to me is not worth this piece of dung! But Islam – praise be to Allah – has ordained this short period, four months and ten days. Moreover, is she prevented from cleaning herself? No, rather she may clean herself as she likes, and wear whatever clothes she likes, but she should not adorn herself. End quote.

See: *Al-Mughni*, 11/224; *Al-Majmu`*, 19/433; *At-Tahrir wat-Tanwir* by Ibn `Ashur, 2/421-422; *Tafsir al-Manar*, 2/416-417; *Rawa'i` al-Bayan fi Tafsir Ayat al-Ahkam*, 1/343.



See also the answer to question no. [81139](#).

And Allah knows best.