1665 - Is Marriage Compulsory in Islam?

the question

Is it obligatory for a woman to get married?

Summary of answer

Marriage is obligatory for a woman who is unable to feed or clothe herself unless she gets married or she fears falling into immoral acts if she does not marry. What a woman can do to fulfill this obligation is not to refuse marriage when a suitable, compatible man comes with an offer of marriage.

Detailed answer

Praise be to Allah.

When does marriage become obligatory?

In response to your question, we will look briefly at what some of the Muslim jurists have written on this topic. In Mawahib al-Jaleel it was said:

“Marriage is obligatory for a woman who is unable to feed or clothe herself unless she gets married.”

In al-Sharh al-Kabir, concerning obligatory marriage it says:

“If a person fears that he may commit fornication, it (marriage) is obligatory on him.” In Fath al-Wahhab, it says: “For the woman who has (physical) desires, marriage is sunnah, just as it is for the one who needs maintenance and the one who fears being taken advantage of by immoral persons.”

In Mughni al-Muhtaj, it says:

"(Marriage) becomes wajib (obligatory) if a person fears fornication… And it was said that it becomes obligatory if a person has made a vow (nadhr) to get married." Then concerning the ruling with regard to women: "If she needs to get married, i.e., she has physical desires, or needs maintenance, or she is afraid that immoral people may take advantage of her… it is preferable (mustahabb) for her to get married, because this will protect her religion and her chastity, and she can enjoy what her husband spends on her, and other advantages."

Ibn Qudamah (may Allah have mercy on him) said in his book al-Mughni:

"Our colleagues differed as to whether marriage is obligatory. The best-known opinion in our madhhab is that it is not obligatory, except when a person is afraid of committing a forbidden deed if he does not marry. In that case he should make himself chaste (i.e. get married). This is the opinion of the majority of fuqaha."

When it comes to marriage, people are of three types, one of which is those who fear that they may commit forbidden deeds if they do not get married. It is obligatory for such people to get married, according to the majority of jurists, because it is obligatory for them to make themselves chaste and protect themselves from haram.

In Subul al-Salam it says:

"Ibn Daqiq al-'Eid said that some of the jurists said that marriage is obligatory for the one who fears sin or hardship (because of suppressing physical desires) and is able to marry… and it is obligatory for the one who cannot avoid fornication unless he gets married."

In Badai' al-Sanai', it says:

"There is no dispute that marriage is an obligation when desire is strong. If a person has such a strong desire for women that he cannot be patient, and he can afford to pay the mahr (dowry) and support a wife, then if he does not get married, he is a sinner."

From the above discussion, we can see a number of situations in which marriage is obligatory. You might ask: “How can we imagine a woman fulfilling this obligation when usually it is the man who goes around knocking on doors looking for a partner? This is not the woman’s role.” The answer is: what a woman can do to fulfill this command is not to refuse marriage when a suitable, compatible man comes with an offer of marriage.

Status of marriage in Islam

Muslim women and men need to understand the high status which marriage has in Islam, so that they will be more keen to marry. There follows a useful summary on this topic by al-Imam Ibn Qudamah al-Maqdisi (may Allah have mercy on him), from his book al-Mughni:

“The basis of the legislation of marriage is the Quran, Sunnah and ijma’ (consensus of the scholars). In the Quran, Allah says (interpretation of the meanings):

‘… marry women of your choice, two or three, or four…’ [al-Nisa 4:3]

and

‘And marry those among you who are single and (also marry) the salihun (pious, fit and capable ones) of your (male) slaves and maid-servants (female slaves)…’ [al-Nur 24:32].

The Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) said: “O young men! Whoever among you can afford it, let him get married, for this will lower his gaze and protect his chastity. Whoever cannot (get married), then let him fast, for fasting will be a protection for him.”(Agreed upon).

There are many other verses and reports like these. The Muslims agree that marriage is legislated.

Ibn Mas’ud said:

“If I only had ten days left to live, and I knew that I would die at the end of them, and I was able to get married, I would do so, for fear of fitnah (temptation).”

Ibn 'Abbas said to Sa’id ibn Jubayr:

“Get married, for the best of this ummah are those who have more wives.”

Ibrahim ibn Maysarah said:

“Tawus said to me: ‘Either you get married, or I will say to you what ‘Umar said to Abu’l-Zawaid: There is nothing stopping you from getting married but either impotence or immorality!’ According to al-Mirwadhi, Ahmad said: ‘Celibacy has nothing to do with Islam. Whoever calls you not to get married is calling you to something other than Islam.’”

Benefits of marriage

Then he said (may Allah have mercy on him):

“The benefits of marriage are many. They include: protecting one’s religion and helping one to adhere to it; protecting and taking care of women; and producing offspring and increasing the ranks of the ummah, thus achieving the pride of the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him), etc.”

[Translator’s note: there is a hadith which indicates that the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) will feel proud of the large numbers of his ummah in the Hereafter, so Muslims are encouraged to marry and have many children.]

It should now be clear that the benefits of marriage are many. No wise Muslim woman would hesitate to get married, especially if an offer of marriage comes from a person who is strongly committed to Islam and is possessed of a good character and morals.

And Allah knows best.