22397 - She wants to work but her husband refuses

the question

My husband does not let me work or study, but I think that I am able for that. Does he have the right to prevent me from working or studying? He is not listening to me and that hurts my feelings.

Detailed answer

Praise be to Allah.

Both spouses must refer to the sharee'ah concerning all matters in their lives. Whatever is the ruling of sharee'ah is what they must apply and follow. This is the way that leads to happiness and ease in this world and in the Hereafter, as Allaah says (interpretation of the meaning):

"(And) if you differ in anything amongst yourselves, refer it to Allaah and His Messenger, if you believe in Allaah and in the Last Day. That is better and more suitable for final determination"

[al-Nisa' 4:59]

With regard to women working and going out of the home, we say:

1 – The basic principle is that women should stay in their houses. This is indicated by the verse in which Allaah says (interpretation of the meaning):

"And stay in your houses, and do not display yourselves like that of the times of ignorance"

[al-Ahzaab 33:33]

Although this was addressed to the wives of the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him), all believing women should follow them in that. It was addressed to the wives of the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) because of their honoured status and because they are the example for the believing women.

This is also indicated by the words of the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him): “Woman is ‘awrah, and when she goes out the Shaytaan gets his hopes up. She is never closer to Allaah than when she is in the innermost part of her house.” (Narrated by Ibn Hibbaan and Ibn Khuzaymah; classed as saheeh by al-Albaani in al-Silsilah al-Saheehah, no. 2688.

And the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) said concerning women praying in the mosques: “Their houses are better for them.” (Narrated by Abu Dawood, 567’ classed as saheeh by al-Albaani in Saheeh Abi Dawood).

2 – It is permissible for a woman to work or study so long as a number of conditions are met:

-That this work is suited to the nature and aptitude of women, such as medicine, nursing, teaching, tailoring and so on.

-The work should be in a place that is for women only, with no mixing between the sexes. It is not permissible for a woman to study or work in a mixed school.

-The woman should wear proper Islamic hijaab at work.

-Her work should not lead to her travelling without a mahram.

-Her going out to work should not involve her committing any sin, such as being alone with the driver, or wearing perfume where non-mahram men will be able to smell it.

-That should not lead to her neglecting her duties of looking after the house or taking care of her husband and children.

3 – What you have mentioned about your being able and willing to work, teach or study is something good. Perhaps that will help you to serve Allaah, such as teaching Muslim girls in your house or in the Islamic center – subject to the conditions mentioned above – or doing something that will benefit you and your family, such as sewing and the like, which will be a means of stopping boredom.

You could also join one of the Islamic Open Universities, which will let you enroll in a distance-

learning program, so that you can increase your knowledge and understanding of Islam, as well as attaining a higher status before Allaah. For the angels lower their wings for the seeker of knowledge, and the inhabitants of the heavens and the earth pray for forgiveness for the scholar, even the fish in the sea, as it says in the hadeeth narrated by al-Tirmidhi (no. 2682), Abu Dawood (3641), al-Nasaa'i (158) and Ibn Maajah (223); this hadeeth was classed as saheeh by al-Albaani in Saheeh al-Tirmidhi.

Ask Allaah to bless you with righteous offspring, because in raising these children a woman will fill her time and will not feel bored, and she will be rewarded for all of that, praise be to Allaah.

Remember that it is obligatory to obey your husband unless he tells you to do something sinful. So if a husband tells his wife not to go out to work or to study, she has to obey him, and this will lead to her happiness and salvation. According to a hadeeth narrated by Ibn Hibbaan in his Saheeh, "If a woman prays her five daily prayers, fasts her month (of Ramadaan), guards her chastity and obeys her husband, it will be said to her: 'Enter Paradise from whichever of its gates you wish.'" (Classed as saheeh by al-Albaani in Saheeh al-Jaami', no. 661).

But the husband should not exploit this right to hurt his wife's feelings or ignore her opinion or go against her wishes. Rather he has to fear Allaah and try to consult with his wife and discuss with her, and explain the shar'i ruling to her, and give her permissible alternatives that will make her happy, develop her potential and achieve some of what she wants.

We ask Allaah to help us all to do that which He loves and which pleases Him.

And Allaah knows best.