99264 - Should she agree to be a second wife or be patient?

the question

I am a divorced woman in the 40’s. I am from a good family and of a decent status in life. I have learnt from my previous experiment a difficult lesson, because it was not a choice based on Islam and morals, it was based on appearances.

A man proposed to me recently. I think he is moral and religious and known as righteous, but he is married and his wife is a family friend of my family. As for social status, he is from a simpler background than ours. I fear how the society will see this marriage. I also fear his wife’s look to me. All this in the stage of proposal and asking my brother for my hand, how about if this marriage takes place! I am from Egypt, and you know how the Egyptian society sees the second wife.
When I pray istikharah I feel comfortable and I feel like telling my brother to accept. But I become strained when I think of the society and people wondering why I had to accept who is of simpler social status than me, and how could I take a man from his wife and children. He did not propose to me due to greed, it is just his wish to help Muslim women in difficulties especially if known of being religious. He is also advising others to do the same thing in order to protect Muslim women’s chastity, and then the whole society’s virtuousness. My brother also witnesses this. He could have easily proposed to who is younger and more beautiful than me if he wanted.
Will I be sinful if I decline his proposal? What is your opinion sheikh? Shall I refuse and be patient, so that someone else may propose to me by the grace of Allah?.

Detailed answer

Praise be to Allah.

Undoubtedly the way in which many Muslim societies (including Egyptian society) view plural marriage is as a betrayal of the first wife, or as something for which the husband or second wife are to be blamed. Undoubtedly this is a mistaken view that is contrary to the law of Allaah, which permits a man to marry up to four wives. Allaah says (interpretation of the meaning):

“…then marry (other) women of your choice, two or three, or four …”

[al-Nisa’4:3]

The Muslim cannot object to the rulings of Allaah, or think that there is any injustice, transgression or error in the rulings of Allaah.

Hence we do not agree with you when you say: “How can I take the husband from his wife and children?”

You are not taking this husband away; rather he has come and proposed to you of his own free will.

Moreover he is going to bear the burden of two families and two households at the same time; he is not going to leave his first wife and children for your sake, so how can that be taking him away?

As for the opinion of the first wife, this is part of the human nature which is inherent in most women (jealousy), and she wants to keep her husband for herself and not share him with anyone. The Mothers of the Believers (may Allaah be pleased with them) who were the best women of this ummah, had some problems because of jealousy, but the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) forgave them and did not hold it against them.

You can remedy that with a little wisdom and good attitude. But it is also essential to put up with some of that which may come from her because this is the nature of women.

The husband must also be wise in his dealing with such attitudes so that he will not make the disputes and conflicts worse.

With regard to our advice to you, whether to accept this husband or wait in the hope that Allaah might provide you with someone else:

The answer is that if you hope that there may come someone who is better than him, then there is no reason why you should not refuse him, but if you are afraid – as you are older – and because of your situation that there will not be anyone else who is better than him, or even like him, then we

think – and Allaah knows best – that you should agree to this marriage.

For a woman to agree to be a second wife and to put up with some problems from the first wife or the society around her, is much easier than staying without a husband.

We ask Allaah to make good easy for you wherever it is.

And Allaah knows best.