220252 - Does there have to be love between husband and wife?

the question

Does Islam state that a man and a women who are married have to love one another? If so how is that possible if the man marries more than one wife?

Detailed answer

Praise be to Allah.

Firstly:

Love between the husband and the wife is something natural. It cannot be said concerning such a thing that it is obligatory according to sharee‘ah, or that Islam enjoins it; rather in such matters, what could be attained naturally is sufficient and there is no need for a religious text to enjoin it.

The one who imagines that married life nothing but a romantic novel or rosy dream is looking for something that cannot exist in real life, as real life inherently involves toil, hardship and difficulty. Allah, may He be exalted, says (interpretation of the meaning):

“We have certainly created man into hardship”

[al-Balad 90:4].

The poet said:

Life is inherently difficult and tough, yet you want it to be free from all problems and troubles;

the one who expects from life the opposite of its inherent nature is like one who seeks a brand of fire from water.

Once we understand this, and we look at life realistically, we will see that seeking a life that is

perfect or free of trouble is something unattainable, and it is sufficient to not let what you see of problems prevent you from finding some comfort and being determined to keep going. Hence ‘Umar (may Allah be pleased with him) said to a man who wanted to divorce his wife: Why do you want to divorce her?

He said: I do not love her.

He said: Are all families based on love only? What about care and decency? (‘Uyuun al-Akhbaar, 3/18).

What this means is: bear with patience any annoyance from your friend and your wife, for people in general face similar situations with their wives and their friends as you do, but they may stick together even though they are not entirely happy with one another and do not love one another, but the need that each of them has for the other keeps them together!

Through care and compassion, the members of a household show mercy to one another, and each of them is aware of his duty towards the others. Out of a sense of decency, each of them refrains from being the cause of separation or of the family collapsing. Think about the words of Allah, may He be exalted (interpretation of the meaning):

“And of His signs is that He created for you from yourselves mates that you may find tranquillity in them; and He placed between you affection and mercy. Indeed in that are signs for a people who give thought”

[ar-Room 30:21].

Think about how Allah, may He be exalted, has told us of the love and affection between the spouses on the basis that it is something created by Allah, and a sign of His might, not on the basis that it is something that is obligatory according to sharee‘ah, that Allah enjoined upon His slaves. For the emotion of love in the heart is not something that is under a person’s control; rather what is under his control is showing kindness and treating others decently.

Ibn Katheer (may Allah have mercy on him) said:

“And of His signs is that He created for you from yourselves mates” that is, He has created for you from your own kind females to be your wives.

“that you may find tranquillity in them” – this is similar to the verse (interpretation of the meaning): “It is He who created you from one soul and created from it its mate that he might dwell in security with her” [al-A‘raaf 7:189], which refers to Hawwa’; Allah created her from Adam, from the shortest rib on his left hand side. If He had made all the descendants of Adam males, and had created females for them from a different kind, either from among the jinn or animals, this harmony would not exist between them and their wives; rather the result would have been aversion, if their wives were of a different kind. Moreover, by His perfect mercy towards humanity, Allah made their wives of their own kind, and He created between them affection, which is love, and compassion, which is kindness. So a man may keep his wife either because he loves her, or out of compassion towards her because he has children from her, or because she needs him with regard to maintenance, or because they get along well, or for other reasons.

End quote from Tafseer Ibn Katheer (6/309).

Allah, may He be exalted, also says (interpretation of the meaning):

“And live with them [wives] in kindness. For if you dislike them - perhaps you dislike a thing and Allah makes therein much good”

[an-Nisaa’ 4:19].

Shaykh as-Sa‘di (may Allah have mercy on him) said:

The husband is obliged to live with his wife in kindness, keeping good company with her, refraining from hurting her, treating her well, and being nice to her. That includes maintenance, clothing and so on.

“For if you dislike them - perhaps you dislike a thing and Allah makes therein much good” that is, you – husbands – should keep your wives even if you dislike them, for there is much good in that, which includes obeying the command of Allah and accepting His instructions, which leads to

happiness in this world and the hereafter.

Moreover, the husband's forcing himself to be kind to his wife, despite his not loving her – is striving against his nafs and striving to attain good manners and a good attitude. Perhaps the dislike may cease and be replaced with love, as often happens. Perhaps he may be blessed with a righteous child from her, who will benefit his parents in this world and the hereafter. This applies when it is possible to keep her without falling into what is forbidden.

But if he has no choice but to leave her, and keeping her is out of the question, then keeping her is not a must.

End quote from Tafseer as-Sa'di (p, 172).

Muslim (1467) narrated that Abu Hurayrah (may Allah be pleased with him) said: The Messenger of Allah (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) said: "No believing man should hate a believing woman. If he dislikes one of her characteristics, he may be pleased with another."

An-Nawawi (may Allah have mercy on him) said:

That is, he should not despise her, for if he finds in her one characteristic that he dislikes, he will find another that is pleasing to him. She may be hot-tempered and aggressive, but she may also be religiously committed, beautiful, or chaste, or kind to him, and so on. End quote.

Secondly:

If we assume that love between the spouses is required of each towards the other, and that the husband must love his wife and be attached to her, then what is the problem if the man marries two women, or three or four, then loves all of them?

What is the problem with that, apart from purely romantic notions about love between the spouses or between two people, and the idea that love cannot be shared with anyone else? It is as if they think of the beloved as a "god" who does not accept any partners in devotion!

Is it not the case that a person can love his father, and love his mother, and love other people? It is

all love of the same kind, and loving more than one is not impossible, so how can it be deemed impossible for a man to love more than one wife?

Doesn’t a man love food of different types, or fragrances of different kinds, so he wants all of that and loves all of that; what is there to prevent him, on the basis of reason or religious texts, from loving more than one wife at the same time?

What is it that makes a man’s love for a woman something different, that cannot be shared?

Is this the love of devotion to the Almighty that cannot be shared??

If it is said that what we see in real life is that most people are like that, and are only attached to one woman, and a woman only loves one man?

The answer is: that is true; in real life most people do not engage in polygamy, but this does not mean that there are not some who engage in polygamy and share love with more than one. This does happen; it happens frequently and often.

Please see the answer to question no. 14022 for information on the wisdom behind allowing polygamy.

For more information, please see the answers to questions no. 95114 and 101130.

And Allah knows best.