83778 - She lives with her mother-in-law and there are a lot of problems between them

the question

I married about ten years ago, and have two children. I live with my parents in law since I got married. I started my marriage life hoping that we build a family, and that they treat me like their daughter and I will do the same. But the relationship with them became “peaceful coexistence”, they may be a conversation so long as they do not criticise me. I do really miss the feeling of being beloved, especially when I am ill or tired. I do not feel that she cares about my health like a mother does. If I get tired she does not ask how I feel or if I feel any better, so I just do not say that I am tired any more. Sometimes she makes me feel like if I am just acting or pretending to be ill, and this really hurts me. As I do not ask to rest while she does what the home needs of cleaning, cooking etc.

The other problem is the nature of my mother in law. She always criticises others’ actions, she is right about some things sometimes, and sometimes she just magnifies. She wants everything to happen in accordance with her desire; otherwise it is wrong, in her view.

The problem is that she mostly criticises friends, her relatives or mine. She sometimes gives really sharp critique especially when she is angry, it becomes nearly like slandering. I feel we commit much of gheebah (backbiting). If I do not answer her or if I try to justify the other’s situation she becomes angry with me. She is only pleased when I say she is right and the other side is wrong. But so we hurt many people by this gheebah. What deepens my sadness is when this criticising is about my family (my father, mother brothers, and their wives). She sometimes is right about what she says, but they are humans and they do mistakes.

She does not only badly criticise a specific manner that made her angry in some situation, she talks about their personal life. If I show her that what she says annoys me, she becomes angry with me.

My father in law passed away less than a year ago, and this made it even worse. She became very

sensitive to any word or action of anyone we know. She even criticises me, every matter in our life she criticises; my way with her son (my husband), my children and my family. She wants me to blame my family for everything she thinks is wrong. Now I see that my brother complements her (for my sake), and even if she gets angry with anyone of them he comes and apologises. Is not this enough for me to confess their complement, as they could easily leave it but they are just apologising to her for my sake.

As an example of what I am saying: my husband travelled for 10 days. My family was calling everyday to ask about us and if we need anything. But she criticised this saying that one of them should have come to us everyday to see if we want to go to anywhere etc. then the appointment of her weekly injection came. So my brother in law came and took us to the hospital, then took us to buy what we need for home. But she still criticised his behaviour saying that he should have bought something for my children who were with us. And she became very angry and said that he is stingy.

As for me, she criticises me a lot especially recently. Sometimes she uses really hurtful words in front of my children. All these years I am just patient, I did not say a word or object to anything, respect for her and seeking my husband’s satisfaction. I always renew my intention considering all this for Allah’s sake.

I feel I cannot tolerate it anymore. This has affected my health and made me very hot tempered with my children. I know this is the only way out to release my anger. I try my best to stop this or avoid it but I cannot. I do not feel that I have my private marriage life. There is no time to be alone with my husband. As I always sit with her and talk so that she does not feel lonely. I try not to let the conversation be about someone, so I just make it about general matters or religious issues.

I do not spend time with my children to play; they are 9 and 6 years old. I do not that I have a home I am free in. As I have to ask for her permission before doing anything. She thinks I have no say in any matter and I cannot do anything alone, until I became really like this. What shall I do? I am doing everything within my ability to satisfy her. I do not feel I am at my home, I feel just like a guest who must be careful about what to do what should not be done all the time.

I have talked about this to my husband. He said that this is her nature and we should not consider it just as if she does this only with us. As she behaves in the same way with all people, relative or

stranger person, all the same. He said I should not let it be burden on myself psychologically. To be honest I could not understand quite well this theory or cope with it.

I became just like “intense electricity”, I store pressure during the day and release it by crying all night so that I maybe able to tolerate the next day. I keep pressing on myself to accept what she says and show no annoyance of what she says about others, I feel very guilty as it is gheebah, or about my family, which hurts me even more. I just try to repress my anger and be extremely diplomatic trying to defend who she is making gheebah of. And I try my best to avoid her being angry with me because of me doing this. Sometimes I really fail to do both things at the same time, which makes her angry.

I lost all my friends, I preferred to be far from them before marriage so that she may not criticise me, and also because I cannot complement them as I used to do before marriage, as I cannot go out to meet them but by her permission. Even visiting my family, we must use a trick somehow to make her say visit them herself. I am not free to go out with my husband anytime. In case we go out alone, we find her angry when we come back, and it becomes very obvious even to my husband that she is angry as we went out alone. I do not find any other reason for her anger although we ask for her permission before we go out.

My husband does not have friends to socialise with. All the relationships are within work or they may meet outside without their families. We had very few relationships with his friends’ families and all finished because she keeps criticising every behaviour of his friend or his family. So we do not have any relationships with any family, while I am from a family who values the social life a lot. My mother’s and father’s friends are increasing over years. I think they both are righteous. They brought us up memorising quran and praying. They taught us that they good companions are very important in everyone’s life. That is why I feel emptiness in this side of my life and I do not know how to make up.

I want to have good companions but I fear it increases my problems with my mother in law, what shall I do? I feel that I just cannot keep on. At the same time I do not want to spoil the best years in my children’s life by shouting at them. My ability to understand and appreciate is all used to absorb my mother in law’s anger. Anyway she is my husband’s mother; he should be good to her as I should respect her. But I feel that I won’t be able to tolerate more. Am I mistaken? Will I use

the reward of patience by complaining to my husband or by directing my anger onto my children?
If I ask my husband to specify sometime for us to spend it together or to go out, will this be considered disrespect or disobedience to her? How can I avoid falling into gheebah? Is it enough to denounce it by my heart and try to defend who she makes gheebah of so that I do not feel guilty of this sin and cause no problem for myself with her at the same time? If I have to answer her, can I say what satisfies her while my heart hates saying it, then ask Allah privately to forgive them? Will I be considered sinful?
I am not just doing what I should with her or at home to not feel guilty, but it is not of pure love. I hoped I could feel as if I am her daughter. But this cannot happen from one side only. As the other side must feel the same as well. Am I sinful then to treat her well only because of the womb relation and respecting the old?
Frankly I do not feel it is my home. We cannot complain to her as she does not accept any criticism easily. And she gets ill when she becomes angry, so is there any way to avoid what I am feeling? Or I have to keep tolerating? I am a human and my mood and psychological state have a very big effect on my relationship with my husband.
Please help me may Allah reward you.

Detailed answer

Praise be to Allah.

You should understand that differences are human nature; human beings are not all the same in terms of attitude, religious commitment, reasoning and behaviour. You should also pay attention to the fact that when a person grows older, their reasoning diminishes and they become childlike in many ways. You should also remember that you are dealing with your husband’s mother, and usually mothers-in-law feel as jealous of their sons’ wives as they would of a co-wife.

If you pay attention to all of the above, then your problems will begin to seem insignificant and your worry will be dispelled. What you are suffering from is something that many women suffer

from, and it needs two important things: patience and wisdom.

So bear with patience whatever you see and hear from your husband’s family, and be wise in your dealings with them, especially with your husband’s mother, for by means of your wisdom you will be able to avoid many problems and you will earn their approval or at least put a stop to their ill will towards you; and you will also win your husband’s heart and please him.

Wisdom in your dealings with your husband’s mother means that you must speak nicely to her, praise her, pray for her, respond to her requests and be more concerned about her than she is herself, if she takes medicine, for example, or she has an appointment to visit a doctor. Gifts also play a major role in softening her heart and changing the way she deals with you.

But it should also be noted that you are not obliged to serve her or take care of her in the sense of it being an Islamic obligation. What you are doing is something that is mustahabb and is liked in Islam, and it is also kindness towards your husband. Perhaps if she realizes that you are doing something that is not obligatory upon you in sharee’ah, and your husband realizes that also, this will elevate your status in their eyes.

Secondly:

This does not mean that you should go along with her in gheebah or backbiting when she does that; rather you should advise her to stop eating the flesh of people by backbiting them. If she stops, that will be better for her, and you will have the reward for that, but if she continues and does not pay attention, then it is not permissible for you to sit with her when she is backbiting about others. Rather you must leave her company and your doing this may play a role in her stopping backbiting. It is not sufficient for you to denounce it in your heart in this case, because you do not come under the heading of being forced to do it. It is essential for her and her son to understand this ruling, and you should understand that if you stay with her when she is doing that, then you are a partner with her in the sin of backbiting, so how about if you join in with them by speaking?

Thirdly:

You have every right to have a separate house in which you live with your husband and children, and you have the right to privacy, if your husband wants you to live with his family, and he will not be disobeying his mother if he allows you that. The wise and intelligent man weighs things against the standards of sharee'ah, and gives each person who is entitled to rights his or her due, and he does not take away from one in order to give to another.

But despite that we know how difficult it is to live separately in many cases, especially in current circumstances when finding suitable accommodation, especially in the big cities, is very difficult to achieve. In this case the man must look at his circumstances in general with an open mind, so that he will not make things difficult for himself or for the people around him. Allah has decreed proficiency in all things.

Your husband has to understand the reality of your situation with his mother, because this is causing you to be edgy, which is affecting your children. It may also be affecting your husband. Hence he should hasten to solve the problems in his household, and he should accept frank discussion with you in all matters. He has to bear the responsibility that Islam has enjoined on him, and he has to honour his family, which also includes advising them and reminding them if they do something that is contrary to sharee'ah. He is also responsible for treating his wife kindly and he is responsible for raising his children. He is in great need of someone who can discuss these matters frankly with him and help him, and you are the main support who can help him in all these matters.

We ask Allah to guide you and set your affairs straight, and to reconcile between you, and to make you a happy family in this world and in the Hereafter.

And Allah knows best.