85163 - She lives in a mixed family home – should she wear the niqaab all day?

the question

My husband and I live in one house with his family, which is composed of one brother and his mother. Because we do not have a servant, the women usually serve the household, which involves hard work sometimes, and that means that the woman needs to reduce her hijab and wear regular house clothes.
The problem here is that the door of the house is always open, and there is nothing to stop one of the husband's relatives, such as his paternal uncle or maternal uncle, coming in without permission. Moreover, when we clean the balcony, the neighbours and everyone in the street can see us. Is it correct for us to wear the niqaab only when going out, or should we wear it in the house from morning until evening, knowing that this will cause a great deal of hardship for us?
Please note that we have our own apartment, but we only go there to sleep.
Please note that this is not only my problem; it is faced by many of the woman who want to wear shar'i hijab, the niqaab.
What should we do?
Please advise us, may Allah reward you.

Detailed answer

Praise be to Allah.

Firstly:

This problem, as you say, is not only your problem, rather it is a problem that comes up over and over again in countries where the society allows mixed living, where a man stays with his family after he gets married, which means that the wife is living in the same house as her husband's relatives, his brothers or his nephews, and so on.

Whilst we agree with you that this situation leads to a lot of hardship and problems, and that adhering to hijab and proper Islamic etiquette in the face of this mixing involves a great deal of hardship and difficulty, we also say to you that many Muslim woman who are keen to observe hijab and to adhere to the limits set by their Lord, have managed to overcome this difficult situation and have adhered to the limits set by Allah, despite the hardship that they faced and of which we are also aware.

If this difficult situation with shared living space is one from which there is no way out for the foreseeable future, as is the case in many situations, then you can live with it by keeping the door of the house locked from the inside, so that you can cover yourself and put on your hijab when any non-mahram men want to enter, or wearing proper hijab when they are in the house, and making sure that you are not with them in the same room or enclosed space as much as possible, even when you are wearing hijab.

Your husband also has an important role to play with regard to this problem. He should advise his brother, and his male relatives in general, to observe this etiquette, as it is one of the limits set by Allah, and we have no right to transgress it, and it is not permissible for anyone to toy with it.

There is a warning against being lenient with regard to the husband's relatives entering upon his wife, as the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) said: "Beware of entering upon women." One of the Ansaar said: O Messenger of Allah, what do you think about the in-law? He said: "The in-law is death." Narrated by al-Bukhaari (5232) and Muslim (2172). Al-Layth ibn Sa'd said: The in-law is the brother of the husband and similar relatives of the husband, his cousins etc.

Although we agree that it will be difficult to do at first, because many people love to go against the rulings and are reluctant to adhere to the limits and proper etiquette, we assure you that it will soon become a habit and something that they get used to. But in the beginning it will require serious effort and patience. It will help you and your husband to be patient if you remember that the reward is commensurate with the level of difficulty faced.

Secondly:

What you have mentioned about having a separate apartment offers a way out and a clear solution to this problem. As for your husband, he has two options.

1 – Either he may agree to your living in this separate apartment, and for you to stay there most of the day, as is usually the case for wives, so long as the family home is open and men who are not your mahrams can enter from time to time, and so long as there are other men living with you, which causes you hardship as you have mentioned in your question, otherwise he will be taking the matter of hijab and mixing lightly which will result in sin and fitnah.

2 – If your circumstances prevent that and these is no hope of moving to separate accommodation in the foreseeable future, for one reason or another, then he and his family have to help you to adhere to your hijab and your religious commitment, as we have suggested above. It is not so hard or difficult; many people adhere to that and do just fine.

Thirdly:

It is obligatory for a woman to cover her face in front of non-mahram men, according to the more correct of the two scholarly opinions. We have explained the evidence for that in the answer to question no. 11774. And we have explained the evidence for the prohibition on mixing in the answer to question no. 12525.

Included among “non-mahram men” are the husband’s brother, paternal uncle, and maternal uncle. The wife cannot uncover her face in front of them.

Based on that, you have to cover your face and all of your body when you go out on the balcony and can be seen by men in the street and elsewhere. This should not cause any hardship because it is not something that you do all the time. You can also put a screen around the balcony so that other people will not be able to see the one who is standing there.

Remember that the rulings of Islam are easy, not hard, as Allah says (interpretation of the meaning):

“Allah does not want to place you in difficulty, but He wants to purify you, and to complete His

Favour to you that you may be thankful”

[al-Maa'idah 5:6]

Islam came to achieve that which is in the interests of both men and woman, and to protect all of society against the causes of corruption and deviation. Difficulty arises because of a mistake in application or a failure to benefit from the blessings bestowed by Allah. Hence we repeat that you should make use of the separate apartment, and try to live there, away from any mixing and crowding, and you will find happiness and comfort in sha Allah.

May Allah help us and you to do that which He loves and which pleases Him.

And Allah knows best.