



Polygamy in Islam





In the Name of Allah,
the Most Gracious,
the Most Merciful



Why men can marry more than one wife in Islam?

This question is one of those questions most asked about Islam. Even before one answers, it ought to be known that Islam was not the inventor of polygamy. Polygamy was known and practiced by many civilizations and religions prior to Islam and is still being practiced in many parts of the non-Muslim world.

In some places, non-Muslim men are permitted to marry to a host of women whose number reaches tens and sometimes hundreds, without any condition or restriction. In United States, for example, Mormons practice Polygamy as do Jews in modern Israel.

The Jewish law permits us to have as many wives as we can get. Nowadays, a Muslim has to limit himself to four wives in this world, but we Jews have no such constrictions.

When a wife cannot bear children or is mentally ill, the rabbis give a husband the right to marry a second woman without divorcing his first wife.

Also, in Africa, men still practice polygamy. Islam, on the other hand, laid down definite restrictions and conditions for polygamy. It limited the maximum number of wives to four.

﴿وَإِنْ خِفْتُمْ أَلَّا تُقْسِطُوا فِي الْيَتَامَىٰ فَانكِحُوا مَا طَابَ لَكُمْ
مِّنَ النِّسَاءِ مَثْنَىٰ وَثُلَّةً وَرُبْعًا ۚ فَإِنْ خِفْتُمْ أَلَّا تَعْدِلُوا فَوَاحِدَةً أَوْ
مَا مَلَكَتْ أَيْمَانُكُمْ ۚ ذَٰلِكَ أَذْنَىٰ أَلَّا تَعُولُوا﴾

And if you fear that you will not deal justly with the orphan girls, then marry women of your choice, two or three or four; but if you fear that you shall not be able to deal justly with them, then only one or those your right hands possess. That is more suitable that you may not incline (to injustice). The Qur'an, Surah An-Nisa [4]: 3.



Those who had more than four wives at the time of embracing Islam were required to divorce the additional wives. Islam further reformed the institution of polygamy by mandating equal treatment of all wives. A Muslim has to be fair in his treatment to his wives. He is not permitted to differentiate between his wives in regard to sustenance, expenditures, time and other obligations of husbands.

As a way of life, Islam is in harmony with nature, providing humans solutions to complex situations and avoiding extremes. This characteristic of Islam can be observed most clearly in its stand concerning the taking of more than one wife. Islam permits a Muslim man to marry more than one woman in order to resolve some very pressing human problems, individual as well as social. Examples of such

social problems could be seen when the number of women in the world exceeds that of men.

Population	Male	Female
RUSSIA	41.6 %	53.9 %
UK	48.6 %	51.5 %
USA	48.8 %	51.2 %
BRAZIL	49.7 %	50.27 %

[The New Encyclopedia Britannica, vol. 17, pp. 34, 270, 244]

The surplus of women is a result of men dying from wars, violent crimes, and from women outliving men. Bertrand Russell writes:

And in all countries where there is an excess of women, it is an obvious injustice that those women who, by arithmetical necessity, must remain unmarried should be wholly debarred from sexual experience.

On February 14, 1650, the parliament at Nuremberg decreed that because so many men were killed during the Thirty Years War, every man was allowed to marry up to ten women.

In some countries one out of every five women today has no potential mate because there are simply not enough single men. In the U.S., there are 34 million single women. A 25-year-old single woman faces a serious undersupply of available men to start with, and the situation gets worse the older a woman gets. Divorced men are much more likely than divorced women to remarry (and they tend to marry younger women), therefore there are more than twice as many single women as there are single men in their 40s.

Indeed, a woman who divorces at 35 today is likely to remain single for the rest of her life. Caught in a demographic bind while seeking greater autonomy, more and more single women are opting for involvement with married men.

Another example of social problems which women faces on a daily basis are cases of abuse and mistreatment. They are sometimes abandoned, divorced, widowed or ill in health with no shelter to go to. In such cases, what should women do for their needs and protection? Who will help them in providing and raising their children? These situations of social unbalance are repeated throughout societies and throughout the centuries.

When we agree that this is indeed a real issue, then we should ask ourselves what the solution is? What should these lonely abandoned women do in order to have a family of their own? Would not polygamy offer a solution for this predicament?



Other reasons for men marrying more than one wife can be based on personal issues. For example:

01 A woman who cannot bear children or is unwilling to bear children.

02 When the woman is sick to the extent that she can no longer have sexual relationship with her husband.

03 When the marriage is not successful, and the couple does not want to divorce for the sake of their children.

04 If a man has an excessive sexual libido and his partner cannot meet his needs, he can marry more than one wife in order to prevent himself indulging in adultery.

If a man travels for months and does not return home during that period of time and is unable to retain his sexual need, he can therefore protect himself by remarrying instead of falling into temptation of adultery.

For all the above personal cases the situation could be reversed, if the man could not conceive children or is of ill health or has a sexual dysfunction or has abusive manners, etc., his wife could request to be divorced either from her husband or a court of law.

Regardless of whether the case is social or personal, the second wife has the choice to accept or reject marrying a man that is already married. Also, the first wife has the choice to stay or divorce her husband if he marries in addition to her.

Islam strives to maintain the family structure by keeping the pillars of the family - the father and mother - together. But, most importantly, Islam prevents the causes of adultery which may result in illegitimate children and where it is usually the single mother that suffers. The women in an adulterous relationship is condemned by the society while her child grows up disoriented with no father figure to look up to.

Men who are unwilling to take responsibility hold the position that monogamy protects the rights of women, and they are opposed to polygamy; but are these men really concerned about the rights of women? The truth of the matter is that monogamy protects men, allowing them to “play around” without avoiding any responsibility for

their sexual conduct. Easy birth control and liberal abortion has opened the door to illicit sex with women and the so-called sexual revolution. But the woman is still the one who suffers the trauma of abortion and the side effects of birth-control methods.

Taking aside the plagues of venereal disease, herpes and AIDS, the male continues to enjoy himself free of worry. Men are the ones protected by monogamy while women continue to be victims of men's desires. Polygamy forces men to face up to responsibility and fidelity. It would require them to protect and spend on their additional wives and their offsprings.

It is really strange for nations to consider polygamy illegal while homosexuality is legal. It is inhuman to have a woman as a second wife, according to these biased standards, but if the relation

happens to be a male “mistress,” then it is acceptable and is not considered a crime. To leave a substantial number of women “on the shelf” by denying their attachment to men as a second wife is deemed acceptable. While homosexuality is promoted as an alternative lifestyle in conformity with the requirements of the modern man.

Modern nations attitude is the logical outcome of rejecting God’s revelation that brings harmony between human beings and their innate nature. Polygamy is considered so abhorrent that it is reacted to with great hostility, while men in the modern world are free to have any number of girlfriends or boyfriends or both without restriction and without any legal or moral accountability, either in respect to the woman or to the children she may bear as a result of such irreligious

and immoral plurality of extra-marital relationships.

All mandates in the religion of Islam are from God, the All-Wise. All things which are permitted are due to the fact that their benefit to the self and society outweighs their harm. When one analyzes the reasons behind polygamy, they will find that indeed the rulings in the religion of Islam are truly those which suits all times and places, as their source is God Almighty, the All-Wise and All-Knowing. Marriage in Islam is a strong bond and a binding contract, based on the intention of both partners to live together in order to attain, as individuals, the benefit of tranquility, affection, and mercy. As well as to attain the social goal of the reproduction and perpetuation of the human species.

﴿وَاللَّهُ جَعَلَ لَكُمْ مِنْ أَنْفُسِكُمْ أَزْوَاجًا وَجَعَلَ لَكُمْ مِنْ
أَزْوَاجِكُمْ بَنِينَ وَحَفَدَةً وَرَزَقَكُمْ مِنَ الطَّيِّبَاتِ أَفَبِالْبَاطِلِ
يُؤْمِنُونَ وَبِنِعْمَتِ اللَّهِ هُمْ يَكْفُرُونَ﴾

And Allah has made for you (mates or wives) of your own kind, and has made for you from your wives, sons and grandsons, and has bestowed on you good provisions. Do they then believe in false deities and deny the Favour of Allah. The Qur'an, Surah An-Nahl [16]: 72



Polygamy is a matter of mutual consent. No one can force a woman to marry a married man. Islam simply permits polygamy; it neither forces nor requires it. Besides, a woman may stipulate that her husband must not marry any other woman as a second wife in her prenuptial contract. Accusing Islam of allowing men to put down women, abuse or use them for their lust and pleasures by marrying more than one is a misinterpretation of Islam's stand on polygamy.





Why women cannot marry more than one husband?

In Islam, as with most all other religions and legal systems, women cannot marry more than one man, but can instead ask for divorce and seek a better suitor for their own personal needs.

This prohibition is mainly due to the physical differences which God has created between men and women.

However, let us assume that a woman did get married to more than one man, what would be the solution then to the following issues?

If each man she married wanted a child, would they not have to wait nine months in order to get her pregnant since a woman cannot conceive more than once every nine months?

What if she did not want to conceive due to illness and bad health?

What if she reaches the age where she is not able to bear children anymore, while the man is able to conceive children until the end of his life?

What should all these men do if they want children and she cannot grant them anymore?

Above all when she is able to bring children, whose child would it be anyway?

How could any of the men she married be so sure that the child is his and not from the other husband?

Samples of the child's DNA would be taken in order to know whom it belongs to. They would have to decipher and fight between themselves to determine by whom and when she became pregnant.

What about the menstruation period, does not that limit all husbands from sexual intercourse?

We can conclude from the above that the physical differences between men and women limit women from marrying more than one man.



Why the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) married more than one wife?

First, we need to understand that every prophet chosen by God came with certain conditions for his time and his people. Such conditions were only known by God and granted by Him to his prophets, as was the case with Adam (peace be upon him) and his wife, Eve, whose sons and daughters married each other while it was later forbidden by God for siblings to marry. However, God at that time had granted

His Prophet Adam (peace be upon him) the permission to allow such marriage in order to reproduce and evolve into nations and civilizations. Similar reasons and conditions have been granted by God to other prophets, such as Prophet David (peace be upon him) who married one hundred wives and Prophet Solomon (peace be upon him) who, according to the Torah, had seven hundred wives and three hundred concubines. According to the Bible:

Abraham had three wives (Genesis 16:1, 16:3, 25:1)

Moses had two wives (Exodus 2:21, 18:1-6; Numbers 12:1)

Jacob had four wives (Genesis 29:23, 29:28, 30:4, 30:9)

David had at least 18 wives (1 Samuel 18:27, 25:39-44; 2

Samuel 3:3, 3:4-5, 5:13, 12:7-8, 12:24,
16:21-23)

Solomon had 700 wives (1 Kings 11:3)

Therefore, the claim that Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) married more than one wife due to his lusts and desires is completely absurd. Prophet Muhammed (peace be upon him) married eleven wives in total, nine at any one time.



His first wife was Khadija whom he married when he was 25 years of age. Khadija was 15 years older than him (40 years old) and had been married twice before marrying Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him). She bore him four out of five of his children. Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) stayed married to Khadija for 25 years until her death.

At the age of 50, the Prophet married his next wife, Sawda who was the first widowed women in Islam. By marrying her, the Prophet protected Sawda and granted her the respect and security she deserved after the death of her husband. In addition, Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) wanted to teach the Muslim society solidarity and how they should unite and help each other as Sawda had no children or relatives to help her in her day-to-day life.

Does that sound like a Prophet who marries out of lust when his lust should be at its peak at the age of 25?

The Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) had reasons for marrying more than one wife.

Here are some of these reasons that are known:

- 01 The first reason was for spreading the teachings of Islam to both men and women. Since Islam is practiced in everything Muslims do, the detailed information of women's issues regarding menstruation, sex and childbirth and the like, was usually explained to women by the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) wives, who were taught by Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) in order to

spread the teachings of Islam to all. Therefore, his wives had a huge responsibility in educating and explaining the importance of such detailed information to all other women.

02 The second reason was for his Sunnah (which is a record of his sayings, actions, personal habits and moral behavior) to spread and to be taught. This was extremely important since it was the guide to perfect the Islamic character. Aisha, the wife of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him), said about her husband: “His moral constitution is the Qur’an.”

03 The third reason was alliances with other nations, religions and tribes. The Prophet’s marriages

served a political and religious purposes since they stopped some tribes from fighting the Muslims and caused a great amount of people to enter into Islam.

04 The fourth reason is for maintaining closer relations with his companions whom he sought as family relatives and not just as friends and followers.

05 The fifth reason is teaching the Islamic society to be unified with each other by helping and providing for any women who had no other shelter or was in danger of being mistreated and abused.

Some of the reasons mentioned above applies to the Prophet Muhammad's (peace be upon him) marriage to Aisha. She was his best friend's daughter and was married to Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) at a young age (which was a normal act of marriage that was culturally and morally acceptable at that century and centuries before it)

Biblical Jacob fell in love with Rachel when she was only seven and brought forth from her a line of saints including Mary, mother of Christ.

Also, the Talmud stipulates the permitted age of marriage for girls at three years and one day.²

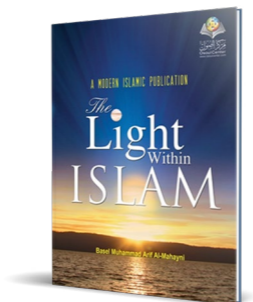
Aisha lived for 46 years after the Prophet's death, spreading throughout those years the teaching of Islam and Prophet Muhammad's (peace be upon him) Sunnah.

These are just some of the reasons we know of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) marrying more than one wife. And there are other reasons that only Allah knows of.



This is an excerpt
of a larger book titled
“The Light Within Islam”
by Basel Muhammad Arif Al-Mahayni.

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