

Islam Question & Answer

General Supervisor:
Shaykh Muhammad Saalih al-Munajjid

2083 - Does a woman have the right to hit her husband if he mistreats her?

the question

Assalamu Alaikum

I know that in Islam a husband is allowed to lightly tap his wife (never in the face) and only as a last resort if she is disobedient. Can you tell me whether this is also the case in the event of the husband being disobedient. I was told that she is not allowed to tap her husband because Islam practices gender inequality.

What is the truth? Please answer as soon as you can because I want to embrace Islam and my friends and some family members say that Islam discriminates against women when it comes to these issues.

Jazak Allah

Detailed answer

Praise be to Allaah.

We would like to apologize for answering only one of your questions, due to the fact that our time is short. Now let us answer your question as follows:

If a father mistreats his son, does the son have the right to hit his father? Why not?

If a mother mistreats her daughter, does the daughter have the right to hit her mother? Why not?

If a teacher mistreats his student, does the student have the right to hit his teacher? Why not?

If a commander mistreats a soldier, does the soldier have the right to hit his commander? Why not?

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The answer in all the above cases is: No, and the reason for this is clear. It is because the father's position is higher than that of his son, the mother's position is higher than that of her daughter, and the teacher's position is higher than that of the student. Hence it is not appropriate for the people in the lower position to punish those whose position is higher. The same applies to husband and wife: the husband is in charge of his wife, and she has to obey him and not go out without his permission, otherwise the stability of the family will be destroyed. The family should have just one leader to steer its course, and that leader is the one who spends on the family and protects it. The husband is physically stronger and is more wise than the wife. We can easily understand if he disciplines his wife when she does something wrong, but we cannot imagine the wife hitting the husband if he is at fault. Would she hit someone who is physically stronger than she is? Would she hit her leader and protector? At the same time, the husband is not allowed to hit his wife for every little thing or as he wishes. If she is at fault or is rebellious, he should first warn and advise her. If that doesn't work, then he should withhold conjugal relations and not speak to her, until she comes to her senses. If that doesn't work, then he is allowed to hit her, but not in a painful fashion. This does not mean that her entire body is his to beat as he wishes - no, and a thousand times no! Islam does not allow him to hit her severely or leave bruises, or break her bones, or cause her to bleed, neither is he allowed to hit her on the face (as you pointed out in your question). The hitting that is allowed is within certain limits and is for the purpose of discipline, not for revenge or to vent one's anger. If his wife responds and returns to obedience, he has no right to seek means of annoyance against her. Allaah says (interpretation of the meaning): "Men are the protectors and maintainers of women, because Allaah has made one of them to excel the other, and because they spend (to support them) from their means. Therefore the righteous women are devoutly obedient (to Allaah and to their husbands), and guard in the husband's absence what Allaah order them to guard (e.g., their chastity, their husband's property, etc.). As to those women on whose part you fear ill-conduct, admonish them (first), (next), refuse to share their beds, (and last) beat them (lightly, if it is useful), but if they return to obedience, seek not against them means (of annoyance). Surely, Allaah is Ever Most High, Most Great." [al-Nisaa' 4:34]

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If it is the husband who is mistreating his wife, that does not mean that she should remain oppressed or that her hands are tied. She has the right – just as the husband has – to warn and advise him, and to remind him to fear Allaah. If that does not work, she can seek the help of wise people among his relatives and her own, and they can advise him. If this does not work, then the matter can be taken to a qaadi (Muslim judge) who can force him to do the right thing – and Allaah is above them all.

When Islam differentiates between the sexes, it is in the interests of both, and this is the essence of wisdom. Unlike a man, a woman does not have to pray and fast when she has her period, out of consideration for her condition.

She does not have to spend on her husband, because he is stronger and more able to earn a living. In return, she has to obey him and ask his permission before leaving the house; the reverse does not apply. In the event of a separation, it is the mother, and not the father, who has the right to custody of the children. And there are other rulings which are based on an acknowledgment of the differences between the sexes. Can we then say that this is oppression or unfair discrimination? No, by Allaah, this is justice and wisdom, revealed by the Wise, All-Aware, All-Knowing, All-Seeing.

We hope that this explanation will make the true picture clearer for you. Put aside the doubts and confusions of those who are ignorant and hate this religion, and enter Islam in which there is justice, safety, security and happiness. Peace be upon those who follow true guidance.