84306 - Should he marry someone who is above him in terms of social status?

the question

I am a young Muslim man and praise be to Allaah I want to keep myself chaste by marrying a Muslim sister whose social status is above mine. What is the Islamic ruling on that?.

Detailed answer

Firstly:

If a man is able to provide the mahr (dowry) and can afford the expenses of marriage and the maintenance of his wife and household, then he is compatible with her, according to the majority of scholars, both those who regard wealth as a condition of compatibility, such as the Hanafis and Hanbalis, and those who do not, such as the Maalikis and the Shaafa'is according to the more correct view among them.

As for the view that the husband must be rich on the same level as the wife, this is a less correct view that was held by some of the fuqaha'.

But the correct view, based on the evidence, is that compatibility does not matter except with regard to religious commitment, as is the view of Maalik (may Allaah have mercy on him). Ibn al-Qayyim (may Allaah have mercy on him) said: Chapter on the ruling of the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) on compatibility in marriage. Allaah, may He be exalted, says (interpretation of the meaning):

"O mankind! We have created you from a male and a female, and made you into nations and tribes, that you may know one another. Verily, the most honourable of you with Allaah is that (believer) who has At-Taqwa [i.e. he is one of the Muttaqoon (the pious)]"

[al-Hujuraat 49:13]

"The believers are nothing else than brothers (in Islamic religion)"

[al-Hujuraat 49:10]

“The believers, men and women, are Awliyaa’ (helpers, supporters, friends, protectors) of one another”

[al-Tawbah 9:71]

The Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) said: “There is no superiority of an Arab over a non-Arab, or of a non-Arab over an Arab, or of a white man over a black man, or of a black man over a white man, except in terms of taqwa. The people are from Adam, and Adam is from dust.” Narrated by al-Tirmidhi (3270); classed as hasan by al-Albaani.

In al-Tirmidhi (1085) it is narrated that the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) said: “If there comes to you one with whose religious commitment and character you are pleased, then marry (your female relative under your care) to him, for if you do not do that there will be tribulation in the land and great mischief.” They said: O Messenger of Allaah, even if he is such and such? He said: “If there comes to you one with whose religious commitment and character you are pleased, then marry (your female relative under your care) to him,” three times. Classed as hasan by al-Albaani.

The Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) said to Banu Bayaadah: “Give (your female relative) to Abu Hind in marriage and ask for his daughters in marriage” and he was a cupper.

The Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) married Zaynab bint Jahsh al-Qurashiyyah to his freed slave Zayd ibn Haarithah, and he married Faatimah bint Qays al-Fahriyyah al-Qurashiyyah to Usaamah, the son of Zayd, and he married Bilaal ibn Rabaah to the sister of ‘Abd al-Rahmaan ibn ‘Awf.

Allaah says (interpretation of the meaning):

“Good statements are for good people (or good women for good men) and good people for good statements (or good men for good women)”

[al-Noor 24:26]

“then marry (other) women of your choice”

[al-Nisa’ 4:3]

What is implied by the ruling of the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) is that attention should be paid to compatibility in religious commitment first and foremost. So a Muslim woman should not be given in marriage to a kaafir, or a chaste woman to an immoral man. The Qur’aan and Sunnah do not pay attention to any compatibility beyond that. It is haraam for a Muslim woman to marry an evil adulterer. No attention is paid to lineage, profession, wealth, or whether the man is free or a slave. It is permissible for a lowly slave to marry a free woman of noble birth, if he is chaste and Muslim. And it is permissible for a non-Qurashi to marry a Qurashi woman, and for a non-Haashimi to marry a Haashimi woman, and for poor men to marry rich women.

And he said: The fuqaha’ differed as to the definition of compatibility. Maalik said, according to the apparent view of his madhhab, that it refers to religious commitment. According to a report narrated from him: It means three things: Being similar in terms of religious commitment; both being slaves or both being free; and compatibility with regard to physical soundness. End quote from Zaad al-Ma’aad (5/144). See also al-Mughni (7/27) and al-Mawsoo’ah al-Fiqhiyyah (34/271).

Secondly:

Social level may refer to lineage, wealth, education, profession or job, or it may mean all of them.

If a man’s religious commitment and character are pleasing, then he is compatible with the woman, no matter what her social level, according to the more correct view, as noted above. This is the basic principle and the ruling of sharee’ah. But it remains to examine the situation of each suitor and whether he is suitable to marry one whose social level is above him, or not.

It seems – and Allaah knows best – that if the difference is great in terms of lineage, wealth, education and profession, that it is not advisable to go ahead with this marriage, because there

are usually problems from the woman or her family. There may be differences in lifestyle and the ways in which they do things, which may put the spouses off one another.

But if the difference is small, or it has to do with one area but can be made up for in another area, then there is nothing wrong with it in that case, such as if the husband is poor but he is highly qualified, or he is qualified for a decent job, or some of his family are of high standing and so on.

Then there are cases in which the woman and her family are so righteous that they are above looking at material concerns and measuring people thereby, and they may want to choose a husband who is poor because of his righteousness and so on. But it is better if the husband is the one who is of a higher status.

Whatever the case, the precise advice in each case depends on complete knowledge of both parties and their families. Perhaps you can seek advice from someone whom you trust in your community.

We ask Allaah to help you and guide you.

And Allaah knows best.