

Nafaqah (Financial Support) and its Philosophy

According to Islam providing for the expenses of the family, including the expenses of his spouse, is a husband's duty. A man must finance all his partner's expenses, even if she is wealthier than he. The necessity of *nafaqah* is one of the certain commandments of Islam. It is the right of a wife. If a husband does not pay it, it remains a debt upon him and must be paid on demand. If he refuses to pay *nafaqah*, an Islamic religious magistrate may divorce them at the wife's request.

Imam Muhammad Baqir ('a) has declared:

أبوصير، قال: سمعت أبا جعفر (ع) يقول: «من كانت عنده امرأة فلم يكسها ما يوارى عورتها، ويطعمها ما يقيم صلبها كان حقاً على الإمام أن يفرق بينهما.»

[Regarding] he who has a wife but does not provide her adequate clothing and food, it is the duty of an Imam to separate them. [1](#)

Ishaq ibn 'Ammar has stated:

إسحاق بن عمار، قال: قلت لأبي عبد الله (ع): «ما حق المرأة على زوجها الذي إذا فعله كان محسناً؟ قال: يشبعها، و يكسوها، و إن جهلت غفر لها.»

I asked Imam Sadiq ('a), 'What rights does a wife have upon her husband, which if he fulfills he will be virtuous in this respect?' He replied, 'He must provide her food and clothes and forgive her indiscretions.'[2](#)

Nafaqah consists of all needs of a family, with regard to available resources and conventions [*urf*] of the time, place, and social level of the family. Some of these needs are enumerated below:

1. Food, fruit, and other such needs according to standard requirement

2. Seasonal clothing according to the needs and social level of the family
3. Carpeting and beds
4. Cooking, eating, and drinking utensils
5. Cooling and heating appliances
6. Living quarters that provides comfort for the family and is in accordance with the social standing of the family
7. Personal care and medical expenses
8. Hygienic and cosmetic products

Criticism

The issue of *nafaqah* has been criticized such: Legislation of this commandment has dishonored women and through it, they are considered stipendiary servants who are given food, board, and clothing for their round the clock exertions and onerous housework.

Response

In answer, it must be argued that this criticism is derived from the enmity or benightedness of the critic because, according to Islam, housework is not the duty of a wife; even regarding fostering, tending, and nursing children, no responsibility has been placed upon a wife. She can choose to do nothing and ask for a servant or she can ask for wages for performing housework and fostering and nursing her children. Even so, her *nafaqah* has been placed upon her husband.

According to this, how can one say that women are dishonored and have been considered stipendiary servants?

It is worthy of note that even though housework and house management is not the duty of women according to the law of Islam, it is considered morally crucial and essential for familial affection and intimacy. It is mentioned in Hadith as *حُسْنُ التَّبَعُلِ* (taking good care of one's husband) which was mentioned previously, in chapter five. A mistress of the house who is interested in the endurance and warmth of the family endeavors as far as she is able to foster and edify her children and efficiently manage her home; albeit in willingness and relish not due to legal compulsion and coercion. The wives of the Prophet (S), his daughter Zahra, and the wives of the Immaculate Imams and Saints of Islam were such.

Criticism

Even though men and women need each other to satisfy their ardor, have children, and raise them, why are all of the family's expenses, even the wife's personal expenditures a husband's responsibility? Why should husbands work and toil while wives eat and sleep and do not even do housework? Is this not unfair to husbands? Why should women be their husbands' dependants so they are forced to obey them and tolerate their bullying and restrictions? Is it not better for both women and men to work and jointly pay for the family expenses?

Response

Several points must be expounded in order to refute this criticism.

1. Nature and genesis has placed heavy burdens of responsibility upon women, who are compelled to carry them out; such as pregnancy, giving birth, nursing their babies, nurturing, fostering, and training and edifying their young. These demanding responsibilities require great time and effort to be performed well, and are not compatible with working extensively outside one's home.
2. Women have monthly cycles and require rest during these periods.
3. Housework and child care are not women's duties either canonically or legally; however, according to ethics and mores, they cannot eschew these desiderata because they are considered essential to familial life and greatly affect the beauty and repose of the home and hearten husbands.
4. Women are delicate, elegant, and beautiful beings and these are their most important instruments of attraction and charm for their husbands. Working in difficult and tiresome jobs outside their homes harms the elegance and loveliness of women, which in turn decreases their attractiveness for their husbands; this is neither to women's nor men's benefit. If both men and women work to pay for living expenses, they will have to compete with men and therefore might be required to accept arduous jobs such as laboring in mines, ironworks, and automobile, petrochemical, and cement industries, civil engineering, railroads, trucking, and grueling graveyard shift jobs.

If women and men were equally obligated to work and provide living expenses, naturally, such problems could arise.

Accordingly, it is clear that women cannot be forced to work like men in order to pay for expenses. Thus, Islam has made men accountable for the family's livelihood, so that women may fulfill their genetic duties at their own leisure and with ease of mind, endeavor in fostering and edifying their children, preserve their cheeriness and attraction, maintain their place in their spouse's hearts, and make their home a place of love and tranquility.

Hence, with love of wife and children, peace of mind, and gratified with their lives, men endeavor more

diligently to produce the family's livelihood and bestow it upon their partners with willingness and genuine sincerity.

In consequence, pragmatically, with true regard to the interests of men, women, and their children, and to fortify the cornerstones of married life, Islam has given men the duty of providing for the family's *nafaqah* and has not irrationally sided with one party and imposed on the other.

It is in the interests of both women and men that *nafaqah* be the charge of men and women be the dependants of men. Because men are attracted to and fond of women, they desire to spend for them, and not only are they without resentment, they are completely satisfied and feel good about themselves when they behave in this way. The financial dependence of women is not a drawback and it does not make them stipendiary servants; rather, it strengthens the backbone of marriage. Basically, in familial life, a man's earnings belong to the family, they are utilized for acquiring necessities; therefore, financial independence or the lack thereof is not an issue.

Here, it must be pointed out that the aim of Islam in making men responsible for *nafaqah* is not to thwart employment of women, make them consumers and 'stay-at-homers', and obstruct them from having jobs and responsibilities outside their homes. Instead, Islam intends that women *not be forced* to work and provide living expenses; however, with regard to her abilities, preferences, and facilities, and the mutual agreement of spouses, a wife can choose an acceptable job and perform her responsibilities outside her home, and thus have an independent income.

Naturally, her income belongs to herself and she need not use it for family expenditures. A virtuous woman would, however, with purity of heart, like her husband, prefer to donate it to the family so that it would have a part in managing and improving familial life and increase serenity and love within the entire family.

^{1.} – Wasa'il ush-Shi'ah, p. 509.

^{2.} – Ibid, p. 510.

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