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What Is The Commandment Of Shaking Hands By Muslims With Non-Muslim Members Of The Opposite Sex?

One of the difficulties faced by Muslims in non-Islamic countries is that in many instances they are exposed to situation where they are in a dilemma regarding shaking hands with non-Muslim woman. Some examples are parties, formal and diplomatic meetings, their work place, governmental departments or at the time of interview to receive visa and so on.

Muslim men and women are exposed in emergency times to shake hand with non-Muslims of the opposite sex. They question whether in these situations shaking hands with non-Muslim people is permitted or not?

In order to answer this question, we should refer to three related matters in this issue. At first we will discuss the view point of Islam in relation to primary edicts, then we will discuss shaking hands with covers such as hand gloves, and then we will discuss about shaking hand in emergency situations.

Primarily Edicts About Shaking Hands

According to primarily edicts of Islam about women, men are not permitted to touch any part of the body of the women, whether she is Muslim or non-Muslim. Regarding this matter, there are many anecdotes from religious traditions.

First anecdote:

Sama Ibn Mehran says: I asked from Imam Jafar Sadiq about shaking hands between a man and a woman. The Imam said: it is not permitted, except for the woman who is forbidden to marry him (the woman who are intimate for man) such as sister, daughter, aunt or niece. But he should not shake hands with those women whom he can lawfully marry, except with cloth or hand cover. Even then, he

should not press her hand.

Second anecdote:

Abu Basir says: I asked from Imam Sadiq about contacting and shaking hands of a man and woman. He said: no, it is not permitted.

It is clear that the answer of this question is absolute and it includes all Muslim men and women. So there is not any difference between Muslim men and women about this issue. In this regard, the statement by some writers that the question is only limited to Muslim women, is not acceptable.

There are other anecdotes about this issue and quality of women's allegiance with prophet that exist in anecdotal books and confirm the same edict and we will not discuss this further in order to summarize the topic.

In summary, according to what is said, it is clear that in normal and non-emergency situations men should not shake hands with non-intimate women, whether she is Muslim or not.

Shaking Hands With A Hand Cover

It is clear from the collection of anecdotes that shaking hands of men with non-intimate women with covers such as hand glove or cloth is permitted, provided that hand-shake is not done with the intention of sexual pleasure or caressing. About this issue for example we refer to anecdote from the honourable Prophet of Islam:

"It is not permitted for women to contact with non-intimate except with covers of cloth."

So, in normal situations it is permitted to shake hands, if a non-intimate man or woman has a glove or cloth that cover his/her hand or he/she does not have intention of having sensual pleasure in the encounter.

Contacting In Emergency And Desperate Situations

In Islamic Jurisprudence, there are key rules such as "No difficulty" and "No Harm". According to the rules the primarily religious edicts change totally and are substitute with secondary edicts. I have expressed 99 rules on this in my book "Al Ghavaed Al Fiqhiah".

The general rule is that there should be no handshake between opposite sexes except where the relationship is intimate as explained above. However, in non-Muslim countries in certain situation and emergencies it may become necessary to shake hands with the opposite sex. The situations for Muslim men not shaking hands with non-Muslim women may result in distress or substantial damage or it causes problem and the man is unable to explain the reason of his action (of not shaking hands) or it is contrary to the common law of that area. In this case contact is permitted on the condition that he does

not have the intention of sensual pleasure and it is an emergency situation.

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