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Family Privacy in Islam

One of the significant instances of people's privacy is their family privacy.

Family privacy consists of two parts: the first part is the prohibition of strangers' entrance and interference in a family privacy and the second is related to each family member's privacy (such as parents, spouses and children) toward each other.

There is no doubt about the prohibition of others' interference within families because in Islam an independent identity for the family is considered and according to that any interference, and presence in the family is related to the family members' rights and no right and permission for non-family members are regarded to violate to this independent and holy sanctuary.

The issue of family members' privacy about each other is a serious challenge in different societies today.

Doubtlessly, all people in their own lifelong need some moments to ponder about their personal affairs in isolation and alone without the presence of others, even their intimates, and need no one to disturb their private sanctuary. This is right in the area of family privacy belongs for all family members.

In Islam religion law, the rights of family members toward each other are determined and a distinguished privacy for each member is defined. At family, parents enjoy their own privacy and children are obliged to observe the parents' privacy.

The Great Quran by emphasizing on the right of parents' privacy without the presence of children, while determining its specific time in this privacy, considers the obligation for children to ask for parents' permission before entering this privacy and states:

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا لِيَسْتَأْذِنْكُمُ الَّذِينَ مَلَكَتْ أَيْمَانُكُمْ وَالَّذِينَ لَمْ يَبْلُغُوا الْحُلُّمَ مِنْكُمْ ثَلَاثَ مَرَّاتِ ؟ مِنْ قَبْل صَلَاةِ الْفَجْرِ وَحِينَ تَضَعُونَ ثِيَابَكُمْ مِنَ الظَّهِيرَةِ وَمِنْ بَعْدِ صَلَاةِ الْعِشَاءِ ؟ ثَلَاثُ عَوْرَات لَكُمْ ؟ لَيْسَ عَلَيْكُمْ وَلَا عَلَيْهِمْ جُنَاحٌ بَعْدَهُنَّ ؟ طَوَّافُونَ عَلَيْكُمْ بَعْضُكُمْ عَلَىٰ بَعْضٍ ؟ كَذَٰلِكَ يُبَيِّنُ اللَّهُ لَكُمُ الْآيَات ؟ وَاللَّهُ عَلِيمٌ حَكِيمٌ وَإِذَا بَلَغَ الْأَطْفَالُ مِنْكُمُ الْحُلُمَ عَلَيْكُمْ آيَاتِهِ ؟ وَاللَّهُ عَلَيْهُمْ عَلَىٰ مَعْضَاعَ ؟ عَذَلِكَ يُبَيِّنُ اللَّهُ لَكُمُ الْآيَات ؟ وَاللَّهُ عَلِيمٌ حَكِيمٌ وَإِذَا بَلَغَ الْأَطْفَالُ مِنْكُمُ Believers let those your right hand owns and those who have not come of age ask permission of you three times before the dawn prayer, when you put aside your garments, in the heat of noon, and after the night prayer. These are the three occasions of privacy. There is no fault in you or them, apart from these that they go about you, you are of each other. As such Allah makes plain to you his verses; Allah is the knower, the wise. And when children reach the age of puberty, let them ask permission as those before they asked permission. As such Allah makes clear to you his verses. Allah is the knower, the wise. (Quran, 24:58–59)

Stating of ceremonies for children's entering to the parents' privacy is an emphasis showing that Islam considers particular importance for family members' privacy and puts a great emphasis on parents' sexual privacy. It is narrated that a person asked God's Messenger (S), "Does a person need to ask for permission before entering his/her mother's privacy?" His holiness stated, "Yes." The person said that his mother has no servant except him and even in this case for each time of entrance, whether permission from the mother is needed? The Prophet (S) stated, "Yes. Do you desire to see her naked?" He replied, "No." The Prophet said, "So for each time of entrance ask for permission."1

The realization of the chastity principle in family privacy and right training of children are obliged of observing of parents' sexual privacy. Not having the attention to parents' sexual privacy will be followed by irreparable consequences in family health and chastity among are children's early puberty and their sexual unbalances after puberty and during adulthood.

The issue of covering of the nakedness which in Islamic percepts is emphasized a lot and prohibition of viewing family members naked are of special significance in accordance with the family chastity principle and is considered as a part of the physical and bodily privacy of members of a family.

Separating the parents' bed and their place of sleeping from other family members' regardless to their age and with the aim of their non-awareness of parents' sexual privacy must be noted as one of the principles of sexual privacy.

The Islam Prophet (S) stated, "Swear to God, if a man has sexual intercourse with his wife in a room where an awake child witnesses them while having sex or hears their voices or the sound of their breaths, that child will never reach to the point of salvation and many a time he becomes sinful with adultery.2"

Besides the necessity of the parents' bed separation from other family members, from the perspective of Islam religion law, separation of the children's beds with the aim of untimely involvement of children in sexual affairs also is of particular significance.

In several narrations of the great Prophet (S), there is emphasis on this necessity.

Regarding this point, the great prophet (S) said, "The sleeping place of a boy with a boy, a boy with a girl and a girl with a girl must be separated since they are ten and in some narrations this separation should

be done while they are younger."3

One of the instances of family members' privacy is the privacy between parents.

Some people wrongly think that due to particularly sexual, sympathetic, and close relations between wife and husband in their married lives, existing of any privacy among them is of no necessity. Also, existence of such privacy causes distance and disturbance in spouses' commitment to their married lives. While, it should be noted that essentially human being is a free and independent existence. Marriage attachment must never be considered as the separation of human being from his essence. Spouses in their own married lives must respect for the right of expressing each other's ideas and neither of them denies another one from the obvious right of cooperation in decision makings, especially decisions pertaining to him/her.

Doubtlessly, paying no attention and ignorance of couples to their spouses' emotions and thoughts and jeopardizing each other's privacy is regarded one of the reasons of married lives challenges and troubles.

One of the emphatic recommendations of Islam to all people is that in their own privacy think and be thoughtful and in their own loneliness, away from the others' presence, become vigilant of their own weak points by surveying and reconsidering of their own actions and feelings. They also attempt to perfect and make progression by improvement their own functions.

One of the teachings of the religion of Islam is to provide spouse's satisfaction and recognition of their personality dimensions and needs and also attempt for mutual understanding.

Of course, observing the principle of moderation which means avoidance of any going to extremes and noting the principle of family survival and the necessity of stabilizing and strengthening its bases are necessary and unavoidable. Keeping of family members' privacy by themselves must not cause the decrease of their sense of responsibility toward each other and toward the family and impedes any family members from doing his determined roles and responsibilities and weakens the family basis.

1. Javaher al- Kalam, Vol.26, P.22- narrated from Majma al- Bayan.

2. Tahrir al -Vasile, Vol. 1.

3. Wasail al-Shi'ah, Vol.5, P. 28.

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