

240804 - It is permissible to consult women and for women to express their opinion in the light of what they think is correct

the question

Are women not allowed to voice their opinion in Islam? Are they required to quietly obey and follow everything a man says? Are women not allowed to question if we see something better can be done?

This is regarding working in islamic organizations where sometimes the leadership of the man is questionable but then women are told to stay silent and do not question leadership. I understand women are not in the position to lead in Islam, but sometimes the men are doing a bad job at it and refuse to listen to our opinion, saying it is against Islam to question.

Therefore, please explain if a woman is not allowed to question.

Detailed answer

It is permissible for a woman to express her opinion and for her advice to be sought, as is indicated by several reports, including what happened during the story of al-Hudaybiyyah. When the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) made a peace deal with Quraysh, agreeing to go back and not enter Makkah that year, he said to his companions: "Get up and offer your sacrifices." The narrator said: By Allah, not one man among them got up, until he had said that three times. When not one of them got up, he entered upon Umm Salamah and told her how the people had reacted. Umm Salamah said: O Prophet of Allah, do you want them to do that? Go out and do not say a word to any one of them, until you sacrifice your camel and call your barber to shave your head. When he did that, they got up and offered their sacrifices.

Al-Haafiz Ibn Hajar (may Allah have mercy on him) said, commenting on this report:

This indicates that it is permissible to consult a righteous woman.

End quote from Fath al-Baari by Ibn Hajar (5/347)

Al-Khattaabi said in Ma'aalim as-Sunan (2/333): The fact that the Messenger of Allah (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) accepted the advice of Umm Salamah to go ahead and slaughter his sacrifice and shave his head indicates that it is permissible to consult women and accept their advice, if their suggestions are correct. End quote.

Ibn Battaal said in his commentary on Saheeh al-Bukhaari (8/133): This indicates that it is permissible to consult women of virtue and wisdom. End quote.

Ibn al-Jawzi said in Kashf al-Mushkil min Hadith as-Saheehayn (4/58):

With regard to the Messenger of Allah (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) consulting Umm Salamah and accepting her advice, this indicates that it is permissible to act upon the advice of women. End quote.

We have previously discussed this matter in fatwa no [36748](#).

The Holy Quran gives an example of a woman who was given authority and wisdom, and how she managed her own affairs and the affairs of her people well. This is something that is not given to many men. This woman was Balqees, whose wise thinking led her to give up shirk (ascription of partners to Allah) and enter Islam. Allah, may He be exalted, tells us of her story with Sulaymaan in the passage (interpretation of the meaning):

“She said: ‘O chiefs! Verily! Here is delivered to me a noble letter,

‘Verily! It is from Sulaymaan (Solomon), and verily! It (reads): In the Name of Allah, the Most Beneficent, the Most Merciful;

‘Be you not exalted against me, but come to me as Muslims (true believers who submit to Allah with full submission).’

She said: ‘O chiefs! Advise me in (this) case of mine. I decide no case till you are present with me.’

They said: 'We have great strength, and great ability for war, but it is for you to command; so think over what you will command.'

She said: 'Verily! Kings, when they enter a town (country), they despoil it, and make the most honourable amongst its people low. And thus they do.

'But verily! I am going to send him a present, and see with what (answer) the messengers return.'

So when (the messengers with the present) came to Sulaymaan (Solomon), he said: 'Will you help me in wealth? What Allah has given me is better than that which He has given you! Nay, you rejoice in your gift!'

(Then Sulaymaan (Solomon) said to the chief of her messengers who brought the present): 'Go back to them. We verily shall come to them with hosts that they cannot resist, and we shall drive them out from there in disgrace, and they will be abased.'

He said: 'O chiefs! Which of you can bring me her throne before they come to me surrendering themselves in obedience?'

An Ifreet (strong) from the jinns said: 'I will bring it to you before you rise from your place (council). And verily, I am indeed strong, and trustworthy for such work.'

One with whom was knowledge of the Scripture said: 'I will bring it to you within the twinkling of an eye!' then when (Sulaymaan (Solomon)) saw it placed before him, he said: 'This is by the Grace of my Lord to test me whether I am grateful or ungrateful! And whoever is grateful, truly, his gratitude is for (the good of) his own self, and whoever is ungrateful, (he is ungrateful only for the loss of his own self). Certainly! My Lord is Rich (Free of all wants), Bountiful.'

He said: 'Disguise her throne for her that we may see whether she will be guided (to recognise her throne), or she will be one of those not guided.'

So when she came, it was said (to her): 'Is your throne like this?' She said: '(It is) as though it were the very same.' And (Sulaymaan (Solomon) said): 'Knowledge was bestowed on us before her, and we were submitted to Allah (in Islam as Muslims before her).'

And that which she used to worship besides Allah has prevented her (from Islam), for she was of a disbelieving people.

It was said to her: 'Enter As-Sarh' ((a glass surface with water underneath it) or a palace), but when she saw it, she thought it was a pool, and she (tucked up her clothes) uncovering her legs, Sulaymaan (Solomon) said: 'Verily, it is Sarh ((a glass surface with water underneath it) or a palace) paved smooth with slab of glass.' She said: 'My Lord! Verily, I have wronged myself, and I submit (in Islam, together with Sulaymaan (Solomon), to Allah, the Lord of the 'Aalameen (mankind, jinns and all that exists)).'

[an-Naml 27:29-44].

Al-Qurtubi (may Allah have mercy on him) gave a brilliant discussion of the wisdom of this woman, and her good management of her people's affairs and her conduct, in his Tafseer (13/194-207) where he says:

She used good manners with her people and consulted them concerning her affairs, and she told them that she always sought their advice in every new matter that arose, as she said: "I decide no case till you are present with me." So how about with this major decision that she needed to take? The chiefs gave her a response that delighted her, as they pointed out to her that they had great strength, and great ability for war, but then they left the matter for her to decide. This was a good exchange on the part of all sides.

This verse indicates that such consultation is valid. Allah, may He be exalted, said to His Prophet (interpretation of the meaning): "and consult them in the affairs" [Aal 'Imraan 3:159]. As for what may be achieved by that, it is either seeking the help of other people's views, or it is a way for the ruler to show respect to prominent figures. Allah, may He be exalted, praises people of virtue by saying (interpretation of the meaning): "... and who (conduct) their affairs by mutual consultation" [ash-Shoora 42:38].

With regard to the words (of the chiefs), “but it is for you to command; so think over what you will command”, what is meant is that they left the matter for her to decide as she saw fit, after confirming that they were indeed people of great strength and great ability for war. Once they did that, she told them what kings do to cities when they invade them. These words were a reflection of her fear for her people and her desire to err on the side of caution; they also implied that Sulaymaan (peace be upon him) was a man to be reckoned with.

Her words ““But verily! I am going to send him a present, and see with what (answer) the messengers return”” are indicative of her proper way of thinking and her proper conduct. What she meant was: I want to test him by sending him a gift and giving him treasures of wealth. If he is like any other king, he will be happy with this wealth, and we will deal with him on that basis. But if he is a prophet, he will not be pleased with this wealth and he will insist that we follow him in his religion, in which case we will have no choice but to believe in him and follow his religion. So she sent him a great and valuable gift, the details of which the commentators spent much time discussing.

“and see” that is, wait to find out, “with what (answer) the messengers return” – Qataadah said: May Allah have mercy on her, for she was indeed a wise woman, both after she became Muslim and when she was still a mushrik (polytheist). She knew that gifts have a great impact on people...

This is indicative of the mature thinking and great wisdom that Balqees possessed and that ultimately led her to believe in Allah, may He be glorified and exalted, and to submit to Him in Islam, and to acknowledge the reprehensible nature of what she had been following of polytheism, as she said: ““My Lord! Verily, I have wronged myself, and I submit (in Islam, together with Sulaymaan (Solomon), to Allah, the Lord of the ‘Aalameen (mankind, jinns and all that exists)).””

The Prophetic way indicates that it is permissible for a woman to ask about what she does not understand, and to ask for proof if need be. Al-Bukhaari (103) narrated from Abu Mulaykah that if ‘Aa’ishah (may Allah be pleased with her) heard something that she did

not understand, she would ask about it until she understood it. The Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) said: “Whoever is brought to account will be punished.” ‘Aa’ishah said: I said: Doesn’t Allah, may He be glorified and exalted, say (interpretation of the meaning): “He surely will receive an easy reckoning” [al-Inshiqaaq 84:8]? He said: “That refers to the time of presentation before Allah. But whoever is subjected to a discussion of his account, will be doomed.”

Badr ad-Deen al-‘Ayni said in ‘Umdat al-Qaari Sharh Saheeh al-Bukhaari (2/138):

This highlights the virtue of ‘Aa’ishah (may Allah be pleased with her) and her keenness to learn and understand. The Messenger of Allah (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) did not show any impatience when she asked him questions. End quote.

It was narrated that ‘Umar ibn al-Khattaab (may Allah be pleased with him) forbade the people to give too much in dowries. When he came down from the minbar, a woman from Quraysh intercepted him and said to him: Have you not heard what Allah revealed in the Qur’an?

He said: What is that?

She said: Have you not heard that Allah says (interpretation of the meaning): “...and you have given one of them a Cantar (of gold i.e. a great amount) as Mahr ...” [an-Nisa’ 4:20]?

‘Umar said: May Allah forgive me; all the people have more understanding than ‘Umar. Then he ascended the minbar and said: I had forbidden you to do such and such, but now whoever wishes to give whatever he wants of his wealth may do so. He said: Whoever is happy to do that, let him do so.

Ibn Katheer (may Allah have mercy on him) said: Its isnaad is jayyid qawiy.

There is a difference of opinion and a well-known debate concerning the authenticity of this story. See al-Mataalib al-‘Aaliyah by al-Haafiz Ibn Hajar, no. 1566, and the notes of the commentators on its isnaads.

So there is no blame on a woman if she discusses, debates, points out any mistakes she notices, and asks for proof, so long as that is done within the limits of Islamic etiquette that is required of people in general, and provided that it is done within the limits of dignity and proper conduct.

Men should listen to women's opinions and accept them if it is clear that they are correct. Wisdom is the lost property of the believer; wherever he finds it, he has more right to it.

However we advise women – and likewise men who think that their bosses at work have made mistakes – not to hasten to object and point out mistakes, until they ask and find out, then they may express their views after that.

At the same time, managers and bosses should listen to the views of their employees and not get impatient if they ask a lot of questions. The Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) did not get impatient when 'Aa'ishah (may Allah be pleased with her) asked him questions, as we have seen above.

Finally, we should point out that there are some reports in some books of hadith which indicate that it is not permissible to follow the advice of a woman, and that it is obligatory for men to go against them. But all of these are flimsy reports that are to be rejected.

Shaykh al-Albaani (may Allah have mercy on him) said in *Silsilat al-Ahaadeeth ad-Da'eefah wa'l-Mawdoo'ah wa Atharuha as-Sayyi' fi'l-Ummah* (1/619):

“There is no basis for the report “Seek their – i.e., women's – advice, and go against it.” End quote.

He also said (op. cit., 1/623): The report “Obeying a woman will lead to regret” is mawdoo' (fabricated).

And he said (op. cit., 1/625): The report “Men are destroyed when they obey women” is da'eef (weak).

Then, after discussing its chain of narration, he said: ... In conclusion, the hadith with this wording is weak, because of the weakness of its narrator, who made a mistake in it.

Moreover, the meaning is not correct at all. It is proven in the story of the peace treaty of al-Hudaybiyyah, in Saheeh al-Bukhaari, that Umm Salamah (may Allah be pleased with her) suggested to the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him), when his companions refused to slaughter their sacrifices, that he (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) should go out, and not say a word to any one of them, until he sacrificed his camel and shaved his head. So he (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) did that, and when his companions saw that, they got up and offered their sacrifices. This shows us that the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) listened to the advice of Umm Salamah and complied with it. This indicates that the hadith ("Men are destroyed when they obey women") is not to be understood as applicable to all women. Similarly, the hadith "Seek their (women's) advice then go against it" has no basis, as mentioned above. End quote.

And Allah knows best.