

Issues and Questions

Islamic Names for New Muslims, Mother's Inheritance

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Q 1. As a recent convert to Islam. I'm totally confused about my Christian name. Bilal Philips keeps his father's last name. Some African Americans keep their first names given to them by their mothers. Myself, I have chosen Samir (friendly companion) for a first name. What does the Qur'an and Hadith say on this subject?

A 1. Congratulations on your acceptance of Islam. Islam emphasizes that Muslims should have good names and should give good names to their children. It is reported in a Hadith that the Prophet - peace be upon him - said, "You will be called on the Day of Resurrection by your names and the names of your fathers, so have good names." (Sunan Abu Da'ud, Hadith 4297) During the time of the Prophet - peace be upon him - when people used to accept Islam, he would not require all people to change their names. He used to change only those names that carried wrong meanings or un-Islamic ideas and concepts. The Prophet's wife 'A'ishah - may Allah be pleased with her - said about the Prophet, "He used to change bad names." (Sunan al-Tirmidhi, Hadith no. 2765) 'Umar had a daughter whose name was 'Asiyah (meaning Tough or Hard). The Prophet changed her name to Jamilah (the Beautiful, see Sunan Abu Da'ud, Hadith no. 4301) Abu Da'ud has mentioned many names of people and places that the Prophet - peace be upon him - changed because they had bad meanings. (See Hadith no. 4305) Imam Bukhari mentioned that Sa'id bin al-Musayyib said that his grandfather came to the Prophet - peace be upon him. The Prophet asked him his name. He said, "Hazn" (meaning Hard). The Prophet said, "You are Sahl." (meaning Soft, Easy). The man said, "I do not want to change the name that my father gave me." His grandson Sa'id used to regret and say afterwards that we still experience the hardness in our family. (See al-Bukhari, Hadith no. 5722). One can only change one's own name. One cannot change the family name or name of one's parents, unless they are alive and accept the change. So the new Muslims should change their first names, if they contain wrong or bad meanings. As far as their last names are concerned they should not change last names, because it is also forbidden in Islam to take the name of someone other than one's own biological father. Allah says in the Qur'an, "Proclaim their real parentage. That will be more equitable in the sight of Allah. And if you do not know their fathers, then they are your brothers in the faith..." (Al-Ahzab 33:5)

Q 2. I need to find out about the subject matter for my mother's items. When my father is still alive does he become the natural owner of everything my mother owned, or is there supposed to be an Islamic distribution of my mother's items. If there is to be a distribution what are the ratios? My father is there and four sisters and myself. I thought that as long as my father is alive I don't have to bother about distribution, please advise. I would also like to know about Zakat, where did the 2.5% figure come from? In the Hadith there is a mention of silver being zakatable at this rate, but does that apply to everything, or is there a mention about this somewhere in the Qur'an?

A 2. After the death of a person, it is important that his/her property is distributed according to the Islamic law of inheritance. Whatever your mother left, you should distribute it as soon as possible. In your case the share of your father will be 25% of all your mother's possessions. The balance should be divided between you and your sisters. Your share will be 25% and your sisters should receive 12.5% each.

The Nisab of Zakat, i.e. the minimum amount that makes the wealth Zakatable as well as the rate of Zakat was fixed by the Prophet - peace be upon him. Just as the Prophet fixed the rak'at of prayers and gave us other details about Salah, in a similar way he also told us about the Zakat. It is very important that we follow the guidance of the Prophet in this matter. Just as you cannot change the Rak'at of the prayers for each prayer, you cannot change the ratio of Zakat also. It is obligatory to give Zakat in gold and silver and also in cash money at the rate of 2.5%. It is reported that the Prophet - peace be upon him - used to tell the people to give one dinar from every forty dinar. (See Abu Da'ud, Hadith no. 1342; Ibn Majah, Hadith no. 1781, etc.)

Q 3. Are we allowed to hold wedding ceremony or other parties during the month of Muharram? We are told that the month of Muharram is for grief and sadness and it is not right to hold any ceremonies or parties in this month.

A 3. The day of 'Ashura is certainly a sad day in the history of Islam. It was on this day that the grandson of the Prophet Syedna Husain - may Allah be pleased with him - and many members of his family were brutally massacred in Karbala on the 10th day of Muharram in the year 61 of Hijrah or 680 of the common era. It is important to remember those tragic events and to take

lessons from them. It is also the Sunnah of the Prophet - peace be upon him - to fast on the 9th and 10th days of Muharram. The Prophet did fast on this day remembering Allah's deliverance of Prophet Musa - peace be upon him - and his followers from the persecution and oppression under the Pharaoh of Egypt.

However, beside fasting and remembering the tragic events of Syedna Husain's martyrdom, there is no other mourning required on these days. There is nothing wrong in holding wedding ceremonies or any other programs on this day or in the month of Muharram as such. All days belong to Allah and Muslims should not take any superstitions from any months or days.

Q 4. I have read several Ahadith that Aqiqah for a newborn is preferable on the 7th day after his or her birth. My parents are in Pakistan and they want to perform the Aqiqah, when the baby visits them in Pakistan. What is the ruling on this issue?

A 4. 'Aqeeqah is a Sunnah. The Prophet - peace be upon him - told us to do the 'Aqeeqah on the 7th day after the birth of the child. (See Sunan Ibn Majah, Hadith no. 3156) However, according to most of the jurists it is not required to hold it on the 7th day. It can be done, according to convenience, any time after the 7th day.

Q 5. Is it allowed in Islam to marry a woman with the condition that the husband would not have any financial obligations?

A 5. The marriage will be valid, but the condition is not valid. After the marriage, if the wife wants she can demand the husband to pay her expenses and the Islamic court can oblige him to do so, or will separate them. According to the Shari'ah, it is the duty of the husband to provide for his wife's well being.