

## President Beji Caid Essebsi tampers with the verses of the Koran

By

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President Beji Caid Essebsi announced the review of a law that demands that a man receive twice the share of an inheritance as a woman. He thought that changing this would put Tunisia at the forefront of a progressive revolution on an issue that affects many Muslim-majority countries. Essebsi's announcement however, has been met with opposition from many Tunisian and Arab women because they realized that it was something that goes against their religion.

Based on the consensus of Islamic scholars, Muslim women are religiously prohibited to marry men from other religions. Essebsi however, also called on the prime minister and minister of justice to make changes to allow Tunisian Muslim women to marry non-Muslims. Essebsi believes that by this, multiple Tunisian women can freely choose their partners.

This strange decision of president Essebsi has prompted some Tunisian men to argue that if there is equality in the inheritance law, then their legal requirements to support their families also needs to change.

Essebsi's decision sparked controversy. Multiple groups view the decision as a victory for freedom. Other groups however, view it as a violation of the basic rules of the Islamic religion.

This decision in fact touched the heart of the Islamic religion. The inheritance law is based on a passage in the Koran which requires that a man receive a share equal to the portions of two women.

Essebsi and some who claim they are free thinkers in Tunisia, saw that this is exactly the sort of social change that's necessary for the development of their country. Essebsi thought that the

inheritance law is one of the main issues that divides Arab families, and that it causes bitter rivalries between siblings. This kind of erroneous thinking means that the Koranic law of inheritance is outdated and in order to be progressed, the verses of the Koran can be manipulated in a way that would cope with present modernity.

Just a day after Essebsi announcements about the law of inheritance and marital rights, Deputy of Al-Azhar, Sheikh Abbas Shuman released a statement saying the proposed reforms go against Islamic Sharia. In his statement, Sheikh Shuman said: "The call for equality in inheritance between genders is unfair because women can already inherit more than men in certain situations." Shuman also commented on proposed reforms that would allow a Muslim woman to marry a non-Muslim men and explained that such a marriage would obstruct the stability of any union.

Some Tunisians were outraged over Al-Azhar's comments and hit back by expressing their anger on Twitter saying that Al Azhar has no rule over their country. Strange enough, some Egyptians who run after modernism and are fond of accommodating traditional religious teaching to contemporary thought, also took a stand against Al Azhar! Even though Al-Azhar scholars stood against the reforms mentioned in Essebsi's speech, the Tunisian scholars at Diwan al-Ifta backed him.

The Koran says about inheritance"

Allah instructs you concerning your children: for the male, what is equal to the share of two females. But if there are [only] daughters, two or more, for them is two thirds of one's estate. And if there is only one, for her is half. And for one's parents, to each one of them is a sixth of his estate if he left children. But if he had no children and the parents [alone] inherit from him, then for his mother is one third. And if he had brothers [or sisters], for his mother is a sixth, after any bequest he [may have] made or debt. Your parents or your children - you know not which of them are nearest to you in benefit. [These shares are] an obligation

[imposed] by Allah. Indeed, Allah is All-Knowing and Wise. (Al-Nisa', 11, 12).

The following verses were sent down, after the above mentioned law of inheritance has been revealed:

These are the bounds set by God. Whoever obeys God and His Book voluntarily, God will cause them to enter the Gardens in which rivers flow. They will be immortal there. That is the great triumph. And whoever rebels against God and His Book and transgresses the bounds set by Him – God will cause them to enter the Fire. They will be immortal there. A humiliating punishment awaits him (Al-Nisa' 13, 14).

The question then arises: why women take one portion of inheritance when we see that they are weaker than men and they are more in need of help than them? Why is it that a man, who is stronger than a woman and whose body is more powerful than hers should get a double share of inheritance?

Islam's position on inheritance is in reality to the benefit of the woman. In the Age of Ignorance, the daughters and wives of the deceased were deprived of inheritance and all of the wealth of the deceased went to his sons. Islam, however, came and annulled the laws of the ignorant times and made women amongst the inheritors of the deceased. From its inception, Islam gave women an independence in ownership and monetary matters, this being a matter that has only but recently entered the laws of European nations.

The fact that the man should get a double share of inheritance is that a man has more responsibilities and he must go to war, enduring many expenses in the process. Aside from his own expenses, a man must also take upon himself the expenses of his spouse and children. What's more, he must give money to the family of a person accidentally injured by one of his family members. Also, it is the man who must give dowry to the woman.

When we probe into the matter further, we find that the inheritance of a woman is two times that of a man. The

responsibilities that have been placed on the shoulders of men necessitates that they spend half of their income on women. Any given man is obligated to spend money on his spouse's home, clothes, food, and other expenses, while the cost of living of himself and his children are on his shoulders.

It is necessary to remember that the rule that states that the portion of inheritance of a man is twice that of a woman is not true across the board. In some cases we find that men and women take an equal sum of inheritance, like for instance the father and the mother of the deceased who take an equal amount of inheritance. In this case there is no difference between man and woman.

A man receiving inheritance as twice as that of a woman is not a type of favoritism, but rather for three main reasons:

**1. Dowry:** At the time of getting married, man is responsible to take into consideration a suitable dowry for the woman. Whenever the woman asks for it, the man is responsible to give it to her. So from the beginning, man is religiously responsible to allot an amount of money as the dowry of his wife.

**2. Allowance:** In family life, aside from the fact that a man must look after his own expenses, he is responsible to take upon himself the expenses of his wife and children. For amongst the responsibilities of a man is the provision of food, clothes, and shelter for his wife that is in line with her social status. Even if a woman were to have a large amount of wealth, she has no responsibility in this regards. Not only does a woman have no obligation in this regard, but if she wanted to, she could ask of a wage for the work she does at home such as breastfeeding her children, cooking, etc.

**3. Special responsibilities of man:** Some very heavy responsibilities have been placed on men's shoulders; responsibilities that women have been excused from. A good example is warfare in the path of Allah. A man must wage war with his life and his wealth. In some of the verses of the Noble Koran war by means of wealth has even been placed ahead of war by means of life. A man must spend from his own pocket the expenses of his going

to war. Or when someone is killed by another person, the men of the family of the culprit must pay money to the victim's family, but women are freed from such an expense.

The dowry and inheritance of the woman is like savings for her future, in case she separates from her spouse or her spouse dies. She can lead a comfortable and respectable life in case she was divorced or her husband died. But the reason that the expenses of the woman is upon the man is so that she can, without any sort of mental anxiety, raise good and pious children. In this way the family, which is the cornerstone of society, will be filled with warmth and love.

Speaking about the other violation Essebsi made by allowing Muslim women to marry non-Muslim men, Allah says in His Noble Book the Koran:

Today all good things have been made lawful to you. The food of the people of the Book is lawful for you as your food is lawful for them. So are chaste believing women, as well chaste women of the people who were given the Scripture before you, as long as you have given them the due dowers, and married them, not taking them as lovers or mistresses. The deeds of anyone who rejects [the obligations of] faith will come to nothing, and in the Hereafter he will be one of the losers (Al-Maidah, 5).

According to this verse, Muslims can marry non-Muslim women from the people of the Book provided that they give them their due dowry.

The Koranic verses prohibiting Muslim women to marry non-Muslims are the following:

Do not marry unbelieving women (idolaters), until they believe: A slave woman who believes is better than an unbelieving woman, even though she allures you. Nor marry (your girls) to unbelievers until they believe: A man slave who believes is better than an unbeliever, even though he allures you. Unbelievers do (but) beckon you to the Fire. But God beckons by His Grace to the Garden (of bliss) and forgiveness, and makes His Signs clear

to mankind: That they may celebrate His praise." (Al-Baqara, 221).

This verse clearly indicates that the Muslims should not marry idolatresses before they had believed in Allah, nor should they allow their women to marry idolaters before they had believed in Allah.

Examining the next verse:

O ye who believe! take not for friends and protectors those who take your religion for a mockery or sport,- whether among those who received the Scripture before you, or among those who reject Faith; but fear ye God, if ye have faith (Al-Maidah, 57).

The verse instructs that Muslims must not take those who treat their religion mockingly and amuse themselves with its principles, as intimate friends, let alone taking them as husbands to believing women. Allah makes reference here to the people of the Book and to the infidels who were at enmity with Islam.

If believing women come to Muslims immigrating or seeking refuge from religious persecution or political troubles, Muslim must test their beliefs before accepting them; if Muslims are satisfied that they are believers, they must not send them back to the pagans, because they are no longer legitimate to them, nor are the pagan men legitimate to them any longer.

This is what the next verse states:

O ye who believe! When there come to you believing women refugees, examine (and test) them: God knows best as to their Faith: if ye ascertain that they are Believers, then send them not back to the Unbelievers. They are not lawful (wives) for the Unbelievers, nor are the (Unbelievers) lawful (husbands) for them. But pay the Unbelievers what they have spent (on their dower), and there will be no blame on you if ye marry them on payment of their dower to them. But hold not to the guardianship of unbelieving women: ask for what ye have spent on their dowers, and let the (Unbelievers) ask for what they have spent (on the dowers of women who come over to you). Such is the

command of God: He judges (with justice) between you. And God is Full of Knowledge and Wisdom (Al-Mumtahinah, 10).

The reason then, behind prohibiting Muslim woman to marry non-Muslim man is that because by marrying him, she was expected to follow his religion [polytheism, atheism, idol worship]. This would also mean that the children that she will bring to life will also be non - Muslim. A Muslim woman would not marry a non-Muslim man, because her Muslim status would be affected: the wife ordinarily takes the nationality and status given by her husband's law.

That is why Allah Almighty prohibited for Muslim women to marry non-Muslim men. As for Muslim men, they are not allowed to marry from non-Muslim women except those from the People of the Book, with the hope that they will enter the fold of Islam after marriage.

It should be emphasized that the verses of inheritance and those concerning marrying non-Muslims are decisive (mohkam) and not allegorical (mutashabeh). The decisive verses are not subject to discussion or argument; they are rather compulsory and obligatory. The allegorical verses however, are subject to interpretation but this must also be within the context of the decisive verses.

The Koran has been revealed to discriminate between truth and falsehood and forever sustain the truth. Those who believe in the Holy Koran should not commit the same errors committed by the people of old who changed the words from their rightful meaning. What they did was to ignore the decisive verses of the scripture in favor of the allegorical ones and interpret them in accordance with their desires. In this way not only did they go astray from the truth, but also lead others astray and created disunity.

In other words, the decisive verse (Mohkam) is that in which there is no doubt between the word and its meaning. The allegorical verse is such that they can be interpreted in one or more ways and though their meanings have a certain similarity (motashabeh). Those in whose hearts is perversity, instead of interpreting these verses in light of the decisive ones, interpret them in accordance with their own desires. In this manner, they create a climate of dissension and turn away from the truth.

The interpretation of allegorical verses in accordance with one's desire, has resulted in deviation from the truth. As a consequence of this deception, a great majority of mankind today has gone astray.

The words of Allah are final and not to be changed or tampered with. We read in the Koran:

The Word of your Lord is complete in its truth and justice. No one can change His words. He is the All-Hearing, the All-Knowing (Al-An'am, 115).

We also read:

[Prophet], follow what has been revealed to you of your Lord's Scripture: there is no changing His words, nor can you find any refuge except with Him (Al-Kahf, 27).

Needless to say, Muslims must follow all the commandments of Allah. We read in the Koran:

It is not for a believer, man or woman, when Allah and His Messenger have decreed a matter that they should have any opinion in their decision. And whoever disobeys Allah and His Messenger, has indeed strayed into a plain error (Al-Ahzab, 36).

There are limits set by Allah not to be crossed. Allah says in His Noble Koran:



And whosoever disobeys Allah and His Messenger, and transgresses His limits, He will cast him into the Fire, to abide therein; and he shall have a disgraceful torment (Al-Nisa'. 13, 14).

It should be realized that the rules of Allah are permanent and obligatory. No one has the right or authority to change these rules supposing various reasons. This is the ordinance of Allah; He judges between people, He is Omniscient, Wise.

We need to submit ourselves with a total submission to the words of Allah without deviation or alteration.

Those attacking Islam in the west accuse the Koran of being unjust to women because of the verses of inheritance. Man and woman are supposed to be equal, then how come that man receive twice the share of an inheritance as a woman? This evil accusation that first appeared in the west fifteen years ago, I see it now raising in Tunisia as a call of reform! The enemies of Islam in the west also accused the Koran by being unjust to women because it deprived them from marrying non-Muslims. This hateful accusation I see it now raised by Essebsi in Tunisia as a means of reform! We are like parrots parroting the contemptible accusations launched by the west against our religion without thinking. And since these nonsense is coming from the west, so it is modernism and development to be followed!

I was really sad to see some of my old friends who were supposed to be intellectual enough to distinguish the truth from falsehood, stood by the Tunisians when they attacked Al-Azhar and its comments on Essebsi's views. They considered the announcement of Al-Azhar a sort of interference in other people's affairs. No gentlemen. Al-Azhar doesn't interfere and has no the power to interfere. But whether you like it or not, Al-Azhar is guarding Allah's Message from corruption and false interpretation. Whether people astray accept Al-Azhar views or not, Al-Azhar will keep on explaining the true religion of Allah to the whole world. As for those who tamper with Allah's words and like to change them from their rightful meanings,

they must remember that every reckless, wrong or evil word they utter against Allah's words is recorded, and it will encompass them on the Day of accountability. Well, pedant guys, rest assured that Allah's eyes sleep not.

Last but not least, The Muslim is a proud carrier of the Holy Koran, and a believer in the religion of Allah -Islam. It is the religion of submission to Allah, the religion of peace, security, dignity, honor, and excellent character. We spread the Message to the whole world. If people believe in it, it is to their own good, if not, it is to their own loss. The end of the journey is black or white, no gray color in between. It is either Heaven or Hell. And for all of us, the end is near. Choose what you like.