

IDDAH (WAITING PERIOD FOR A WIDOW)

What is *Iddah*?

The literal meaning of *Iddah* is to keep count. In Islamic legal terminology, it is the period after her husband's demise, in which the woman has been instructed to refrain from getting married again.

The period of *Iddah*:

According to the directives of Allah SWT, the waiting period for widows is four months and ten days.

“And those of you who die and leave wives behind them, they (the wives) shall wait (as regards their marriage) for four months and ten days.” (Surah Al-Baqarah, Verse 234)

If the widow is pregnant, then the waiting period is till the birth of the child, irrespective of whether it is before the 4 month 10 days period or several months after it.

*“And for those who are pregnant, their *Iddah* (prescribed period) is until they lay down their burden;”* (Surah At-Talaq, Verse 4)

What is mourning:

In a hadith the Prophet (SAW) is reported as saying:

“It is not lawful for a woman who believes in Allah and the Last Day, that she should mourn a dead person for more than three days except in the case of her husband whom she should mourn for four months and ten days.” (Muttafiq ‘Alaih)

Mourning is:

1.To refrain from adornment

A widow observing the waiting period, should not beautify herself in any way or wear ornaments. She should not wear attractive clothes or bright colors. All kinds of make-up including henna and kohl is forbidden; neither can she apply perfume or wear jewellery.

Wisdom: The wisdom of this instruction to adopt simplicity is two-fold: it is done to show respect and honour for the sanctity of the marriage bond and the time spent with her husband; also to avoid the possibility of receiving marriage proposals.

2.To avoid going out.

During the waiting period, the widow should not leave her house except if it is for some important reason (the necessity of which is left to her judgement based on her *Taqwa*- her love, respect and fear of Allah).

Livelihood Requirements:

During the waiting period, if there is no one else to do this for her, a widow is allowed to go out for absolutely unavoidable tasks, such as going to the doctor, taking the children to school, shopping for groceries etc

Similarly, if she has no one to provide for her and no other means of income, and she needs to earn her livelihood, then it is permissible to take up employment, resume her job in order to ensure it's continuity, or as is the case in villages, to work on the land and tend to the cattle. However the other conditions of *Iddah* must be observed i.e. simplicity and lack of adornment and returning home before nightfall. (Allah knows best)

Abroad or During *Haj*:

If she has permanent residence abroad or if she is widowed during an overseas visit, where the local laws do not allow her to stay on, then she should return to her own country. Similarly, if she is widowed during *Haj*, it is naturally not possible for her to stay there, and in these situations, the instruction to spend the *Iddah* period where her husband passed away does not apply. She can return to her own country to spend the waiting period in her own home.

The Prophet (SAW) said:

“Allah does not go after your bodies and appearances, but He scans your hearts.” (Muslim)
