Synopsis of the Friday Sermon delivered by Ameer Mustapha Elturk on January 18, 2019:

Marriage in Islam (Part 1) - The Goal

It can be argued that there are three major life events: Birth; marriage; and death. Life in this world is one of the stations in our spiritual journey. It is temporary and very short lived. We open our eyes to the sound of Allahu Akbar. The call to prayer (azan) is announced in the right ear of the baby, “God is the Greatest, God is the Greatest; I bear witness that there is no deity except Allah and I bear witness that Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah.” What a beautiful greeting!

Similarly, prior to closing our eyes, before death, we are given the talqin. Our loved ones make us repeat the shahadah, there is no deity except Allah, Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah. So, we begin our earthly journey with tawheed, la ilaha illa Allah and end it with la ilaha illa Allah. In between, in the midst of the journey, comes the most crucial and critical event of life, marriage. This is a momentous event, particularly for Muslims.

Married couples are responsible for the continuation of the production of children through the procreation process. Allah (SWT) said, "O' mankind! Be conscious of your Lord, who created you from a single soul, and from it He created its mate, and from the two of them He produced (He populated the earth with) countless men and women. And remain conscious of Allah, the One by whose Name you appeal to one another, and be mindful of your obligations in respect of ties of kinship. Indeed, Allah is ever watchful over you." (al-Nisa’, 4:1)

The first couple on earth, Adam and Eve, were responsible for the entire human race. Men and women of the human family get married, have babies, grow and finally die. Such is the cycle of life.

People go through three distinct periods in life. The first stage is from birth to adolescence, the second is from adulthood to the time of marriage, and the last phase is from the time of marriage until death. This is depicted by the following ayah, “Know that the life of this world is but a play and amusement (first phase); adornment and boasting to one another (second phase); and competition in increase of wealth and children (third phase).” (al-Hadid, 57:20)

The adolescence period is a troublesome period and most difficult, particularly in this day and age, the age of smart phones, Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Snapchat, and access to a very dangerous world, the porn industry. Adolescents go through many physiological changes as they get ready for adulthood life. It’s a very distinct period where they adorn themselves and compete with each other as they show off to their peers.

Teens, especially boys, who reach the age of physical maturity become lustfully attracted to the opposite sex. This is a natural phenomenon. “Alluring unto man is the enjoyment of worldly desires through women, and children, and heaped-up treasures of gold and silver…” (Aal Imran, 3:14) The attraction is natural; without it, the process of procreation would come to a halt. Therefore, satisfying those desires through lawful means is a blessing and worthy of reward.

The adolescent period can be a very difficult period for boys as the males’ sex drive is much higher than that
of their counterpart. Abdullah Ibn Masoud (RAA) recalls, “We were with the Prophet (SAW) while we were young and had no wealth, so the messenger of Allah (SAW) said, ‘O young men! Whoever among you can marry, should marry, because it helps him lower his gaze and guard his modesty (his private parts from committing illegal and unlawful sexual intercourse) and whoever is not able to marry, should fast, as fasting diminishes the sexual urge.’” The only way to satisfy the sexual urge in Islam is through Islamic marriage.

The process of marriage in Islam begins with engagement (khitbah). Traditionally, a young man who is attracted to a young woman may ask his parents to approach the family of the girl or he, himself, may approach the family of the girl and express interest in marriage. The father/guardian (wali) then seeks the consent of the girl and the two get to know one another in an Islamic environment until both parties agree to continue with the engagement, or decide to part ways. Of course, a woman may herself propose to a man of her choice as is the case of Khadijah (RAA). Basically, khitbah or engagement is a mutual promise that the couple will marry in the future.

The conditions for khitbah are six:

1. The intention is marriage.
2. The woman is not in her waiting period (idda) if she is divorced or her husband died.
3. The woman is not among those whom the man is not allowed to marry such as an aunt, his wet nurse (milk mother) or foster sisters (milk sisters), etc. (al-Nisa, 4:23)
4. The woman is not already engaged or married.
5. A man is not allowed to propose to his former wife who is divorced from him three times, the major irrevocable divorce, (Al-talaq alba’in, talaq baynunah kubra). However, the former husband may propose to his former wife only if she is divorced from another man and has fulfilled her waiting period (idda).
6. The couple cannot be alone in privacy during the khitbah period. The Prophet (SAW) said, “No man should be alone with a woman unless there is a mahram (a family member or a relative whom the girl is not allowed to marry) with them.” In another saying, he (SAW) warned, “When a woman and a man (non-mahram) are alone together, satan is the third among them.”

Either the man or the woman may break the engagement (faskh al-khitbah), however, if the man paid something as part of the dowery (mahr) and the engagement is broken, he may ask for it back unless it was a gift.

According to the Prophet (SAW), marriage is half the faith. He (SAW) informed, “When the servant (of God) gets married he has completed half of his religion, so let him fear Allah in the other half.” Therefore, taqwa of Allah ought to be the main goal. Taqwa of Allah is the driving force that will help couples maintain successful marriages.

Let us not forget that we serve one purpose in our earthly journey, “I have not created the jinn kind and the human kind except to worship and obey Me.” (al-Zariyat, 51:56) Marriage in Islam is an act of worship (ibadah) and intimacy is an essential part of marital relationships. We are informed by the Prophet (SAW) that even the sexual relationship between husband and wife is rewardable and considered an act of ibadah, simply because one invokes Allah’s name in a supplication prior to the sexual act.

If taqwa of Allah is the goal, then, unless the couple are incompatible, (the purpose of engagement is to give the couple ample time to learn about each other and know whether they are compatible or not), the marriage should last. Why wouldn’t it last? It is Allah (SWT) who blesses and directs the couple. He (SWT) is in control. Is it any wonder that the Prophet (SAW) in the sermon of marriage (nikah) would recite verses about taqwa?

“O' mankind! Be conscious (have taqwa) of your Lord, who has created you from a single soul. And from it He created its mate. And from the two of them He produced countless of men and women. And remain conscious (have taqwa) of Allah, the One by whose Name you appeal to one another, and be mindful of your obligations in respect of ties of kinship. Verily, Allah is ever watchful over you.” (al-Nisa’, 4:1)
The ayah begins and ends with the taqwa of Allah. It explains the nature of procreation and mentions the first couple, Adam and Eve, who are responsible for the multitude of men and women that populated and will continue to populate the earth until the last soul. So for a married or newlywed couple, “Fear Allah (SWT) by whose name you demand each other’s rights and the womb relations.” Not only is the couple continuing the legacy of Adam and Eve in terms of procreation but they are forming an institution, a family, and a society based on taqwa. The couple should never be unmindful of this fact, “Allah is ever watchful over you.” If the couple have taqwa of Allah, the marriage will then be blessed. This profound ayah tells us how the first couple’s journey of marriage began and how it should continue. It began with the taqwa of Allah and it must continue with the taqwa of Allah.

The second ayah reads, “O you who believe, have taqwa of Allah, as is His due. And die not except in a state of Islam (complete submission to Him).” (Aal ‘Imran, 3:102) We acknowledge Allah as our Lord and Master. One must be mindful of and obedient to Him in every activity we do including all marriage obligations. It is His right that we heed the teachings of the Qur’an and Sunnah and ensure we die as true slaves of Allah who have willingly submitted our will to the Will of Allah (SWT). In other words, the couple conducts themselves with each other, their children, parents, relatives, neighbors, friends, teachers, even with nature, in a manner pleasing to Allah (SWT). This is, “Taqwa of Allah” par excellence.

The third verse the Prophet (SAW) recites in the sermon of nikah also begins with the taqwa of Allah. “O you who believe, be conscious of Allah, and speak words straight to the point. He will rectify your deeds and will forgive you your sins. And whoever obeys Allah and His Messenger has certainly achieved a great success.” (al-Ahzab, 33:70, 71)

This ayah once again stresses taqwa and fear of God and to always speak directly with the intention to bring out what is just and true. This applies to all aspects of life, however in terms of marriage, the couple, no matter how sweet their beginning was, will come to learn that there is no such thing as a perfect marriage. At times, the path is smooth and at others it’s rough. If one is not ready for obstacles and expects a perfect marriage, the couple is destined for doom. Therefore, when a couple encounters issues, they should be open with one another and speak the truth even if it is against themselves, “O you who believe stand out firmly for justice as witnesses to God, even if it is against yourself.” (al-Nisa’, 4:135) They must say what is right, be honest and straightforward and get to the core of the issue, rather than diluting the problem with distractions or unrelated matters.

The ramification of being frank, open, and honest, is divine intervention, “Allah will rectify your deeds.” He will help the couple mend their affairs and bring their hearts back together. Additionally, “He will forgive you your sins.” No matter whose fault it is, acknowledging and admitting guilt is the way to earn Allah’s mercy and forgiveness. As long as the couple are truthful and sincere in seeking Allah’s help, undoubtedly, Allah will come to their aid and help them overcome their obstacles. Nothing is difficult with Allah, the Exalted in Might. We must be certain about this, Allah (SWT) promised. “Whoever has taqwa of Allah, He will make matters easy for him.” (al-Talaq, 65:4)

Studies show that 70% of arguments between married couples ahead of household chores, sex and children are about money. In the same surah, al-Talaq or “The Divorce,” Allah again promises, “Whoever has taqwa of Allah, He will find a way out for him and provides for him from (sources) he could never imagine. And whoever puts his trust in Allah, He is sufficient for him.” (al-Talaq, 65:2,3) Married couples must heed this ayah. Should they have taqwa of Allah, they may prevent unnecessary divorce due to financial difficulties or otherwise.

All one needs in this arduous journey is to be mindful of Allah, “And whoever has taqwa of Allah, He will wipe out his sinful deeds and increase his reward.” (al-Talaq, 65:5)

Imams, therapists, and counselors can only advise couples. It is Allah (SWT) who can achieve anything. The hearts of people are between the two fingers of Allah (SWT). The Prophet (SAW) said, “Verily the hearts of all children of Adam are between the two fingers of the Merciful as one heart. He turns it to any direction He likes.” He (SAW) then supplicated, “O Allah, the turner of the hearts, turn our hearts to Your obedience.” He (SWT) is in control. If one is mindful of Allah, He will certainly intervene and make matters easy.
Marriage in Islam is a blessing. “Marry those among you who are single, or the virtuous ones among yourselves, male or female. If they are poor, God will enrich them from His bounty, for God is All-Bountiful, All-Knowing.” (al-Nur, 24:32)

Help your children safeguard their modesty and chastity. Let them marry according to the tradition of the Prophet and disregard cultural practices not in line with Islamic guidelines. Marriages built on taqwa, not wealth or property, last. A good marriage helps build a strong family, and strong families build a healthy society.

May Allah (SWT) bless all married couples and those who are engaged to be married, may Allah (SWT) preserve the chastity of those who are not married and bless them with good spouses, and may Allah (SWT) increase us all in iman and taqwa, ameen.

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