Marriage in Islam (Part 2) - Aims and Objectives

Marriage in Islam can be a great blessing if the goal, taqwa of Allah, is achieved. This ought to be the foundation on which the marriage and family is built upon. However, being conscious of Allah does not guarantee a perfect marriage free from impediment or difficulty. The couple will surely endure their fair share of ups and downs.

It is inconceivable to have a perfect marriage simply because we don’t live in a perfect world. Even the near perfect man, Muhammad (SAW) didn’t have a perfect marriage. He had multiple wives and in one instance, was ready to divorce them all. According to the narration, they asked for a higher standard of living. The Prophet (SAW) didn’t have sufficient means to sustain his wives let alone raise their standard of living. As a result, Allah (SWT) revealed to him to give his wives a choice; either accept what you have or separate.

“Say (O Prophet) to your wives, ‘If you desire the life of this world and its charms - well, then, I shall provide for you and release you in a nice way; but if you desire God and His Messenger, and the life of the hereafter, then (know that), verily, God has prepared for the doers of good among you a mighty reward!’” (al-Ahzab, 33:28-29)

If the Prophet (SAW) didn’t have a perfect marriage, who are we to think we’ll have one? The perfect union between good believing married couples is reserved for the next world. In this world one must aim at having, not a perfect marriage, but a successful one. The kind where the couple, while enduring challenges of marriage, remain together until their very last breaths. In order for a newly married couple to achieve such an outcome, they must vow to struggle together and support one another no matter the circumstances.

The purpose of marriage

When asked the question, what is the purpose of marriage? Both genders give different answers. The answers vary from fulfillment of physical needs, to companionship, to, simply, make a family. The answers are legitimate, reasonable, and worth pursuing. However, we find that the divine purpose is something different.

“And of His signs is that He created for you from among yourselves spouses, litaskunu ilaiha, لِّتَسْكُنُوا إِّلَيْهَا (al-Room, 30:21). The literal meaning of “litaskunu”, لِّتَسْكُنُوا, is “to dwell.” The Arabic word maskan, مَسْكَن, means a dwelling or residence. The trilateral root is sa ka na and it appears in several places in the Qur’an. In one place, surat al-Nahl. ayah 80, Allah (SWT) informs, “It is God who has given you a place of sakanan سَكَانٍ (rest) in your homes.” Also in surat al-An’am, ayah 13, “To Him belongs all that sakana سَكَنَ (dwells, rests) in the night and the day.” And more in the same surah, ayah 96, Allah (SWT) states, “and He has made the night to be (a source of) Sakanaان سَكَانًا, (stillness, tranquil).” Therefore, one may deduce that the intended meaning of “litaskunu ilaiha”, لِّتَسْكُنُوا إِّلَيْهَا, is to find rest, calmness, peace, and tranquility in each other.
The divine purpose for marriage is, therefore, for couples to live together in peace and tranquility. It has always been the divine purpose. “It is He who created you all from one soul, and from it made its mate so that he might find comfort in her” (al-‘Araf, 7:189)

Allah (SWT) places love, affection, mercy and kindness between the hearts of married couples. “And of His signs is that He created spouses from among yourselves for you to live with in tranquility and ordained love (mawaddah), رحمه. Indeed in that are signs for a people who reflect.” (al-Roum, 30:21)

The Arabic word mawaddah is at a higher level than plain love. Love is usually linked to desires. If love brings bodies together, mawaddah brings hearts together. The married couples enjoy love, affection, warmth, care, mercy, compassion, and empathy. Should the married couples’ relationship be unpleasant and inimical, one may question; what happened to the tranquility, affection, and kindness? An effort on the part of the disputing spouses must be initiated to restore peace in order to once again live together in tranquility. This can be accomplished through the following ayah, “O you who believe, be conscious of Allah, and speak words straight to the point.” Doing so, “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) Allah will indeed reconcile and reunite the hearts of spouses and restore peace and tranquility as He promised, “And whoever is conscious of Allah, He will make his/her matters easy.” (al-Talaq, 65:4)

It is crucial for married couples in their arduous journey to struggle for a successful and tranquil relationship. It is not easy to maintain a stable, peaceful and harmonious relationship. Like anything else in life, working toward these objectives is achievable. Disagreements are unavoidable and arguments are inevitable, but they can be overcome through civil discourse. A healthy conversation will enhance understanding.

The couple must also recognize an external factor, satan, that may contribute to the destruction of married life. The devil will do his best to interfere in the relationship. Among his ploys is to separate husbands and wives and break the family structure. Thus, as conscious believers, we mustn’t entertain his devious ideas nor pay any attention to his deceitful tricks. He is an avowed enemy to man so we take him as an enemy. “Verily, satan is your enemy, treat him as an enemy.” (Fatir, 35:6)

Marriage in Islam is a blessing and a great Sunnah. Unmarried couples should not allow failed marriages and divorce rates discourage them from getting married. The Prophet (SAW) said, “Marriage is from my tradition (Sunnah). Whoever turns away from my tradition does not belong to me.” There could be legitimate reasons that prevent one from marriage, however, no Muslim should abandon marriage for the sake of piety because it is not piety.

Anas (RAA) reported that, “A group of three men approached the wives of the Prophet in their homes and asked how his worship was. When they were informed, they considered their own worship to be insignificant and said, ‘Where are we in comparison to the Prophet when Allah has forgiven his past and future sins?’ One of them said, ‘As for me, I shall offer prayer all night long.’ Another said, ‘I shall observe fasting perpetually, never to break it.’ The third person said, ‘I shall abstain from women and will never marry.’ The Prophet (upon hearing this) came up to them and said, ‘Are you the people who said such things? I swear by Allah I fear Allah more than you do, and I am most obedient and dutiful among you to Him, but still, I observe fasting (sometimes) and break it (at other times); I perform (optional) prayer (at night sometimes) and sleep at night (at other times); I also marry. So whoever turns away from my Sunnah is not from me.’”

The Prophet (SAW) insisted, “Let there be no priesthood in Islam.” Priesthood is a Christian tradition. Priesthood (Rahbaniyah) was adopted by the church as a sign of righteousness. Priests devote their unmarried lives in the service of the Lord. According to the Qur’an, it is an innovation (bid’ah), “But the Monasticism which they invented for themselves, We did not prescribe for them.” (al-Hadid, 57:27) It is unnatural and
counterproductive. Any Muslim who adopts such a practice is not a follower of Prophet Muhammad (SAW).

Prophet Muhammad (SAW) gave us criteria for choosing a spouse. He said, “A woman may be married for four things, her wealth, lineage, beauty and religious commitment. Seek the one who is religiously-committed, may your hands be rubbed with dust (i.e., may you prosper).

The hadith does not discourage marrying for beauty, lineage and wealth, however the emphasis is on being religiously committed. A God-fearing woman is more likely to contribute to the success of the marriage compared to a woman who may possess all other qualities while being non-observant of the deen.

Frankly speaking, even if she is religious, if the couple is not compatible, the marriage is likely to fail. A religiously committed woman goes beyond the rituals. Is she spiritual? Does she behave according to the teachings of the Qur’an and Sunnah? One may be surprised to find sisters (and brothers) who claim to be religious but are devoid of spirituality. Prayers and fasting for some Muslims are merely cultural habits, lacking spirituality.

By the same token, women too must have a standard in choosing her future husband. The Prophet instructed, “When someone proposes marriage to one of you whose religion and character please you, then you should marry him. If you do not do so, there will be tribulations in the earth and a widespread corruption.” No woman will tolerate a husband with bad character even if he is religious. A true pious man adopts the character of the true believers mentioned in the Qur’an and the noble prophet whose high standard of character is attested by Allah (SWT), “And you stand on an exalted standard of character.” (al-Qalam, 68:4)

Above all, know what you are getting yourself into.

Islam is a path that leads to God. Marriage in Islam is part of that path. Both husband and wife will meet Allah (SWT). Thus the couple must do whatever they can to please Allah (SWT). The closer both are to Allah, the closer their hearts are to each other.

The following tips are meant to help couples make good decisions before committing to the bond of marriage.

1. Never marry someone out of fear or pressure. Doing so will lead to failure.
2. Look for a spouse who is compatible to you, take your time before making your decision.
3. Although it is permissible to marry cousins, it is preferable to marry someone who is not related. Genetics show this practice could be harmful and affect the children. In response to a certain family/tribe whose offspring were thin and weak, Umar Bin al-Khattab said, “You all have become thin and weak, so marry outside the family.” Incidentally, this advice from Umar corresponds with current genetic research indicating that marriage to cousins in successive generations is associated with increased likelihood of disability in offspring.
4. Marrying from your culture may be fruitful but do not restrict your choice to only your culture.
5. Ensure you pray salat al-Istikharah before you make the commitment.

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