

Marriage in Islam

Is Marriage Desirable?

by Muhammad Abdul-Rauf, Ph.D.

Marriage in Islam is strongly recommended on religious, moral, social, psychological and physiological grounds.

The following is an excerpt from Marriage in Islam by Muhammad Abdul-Rauf, Ph.D. Fifth printing 1993, published by Al-Saadawi Publications, P.O. Box 4059, Alexandria, VA, U.S.A. 22303.

SCRIPTURE AND TRADITION

The Qur'an, which Muslims believe to be the word of God, reads:

And marry those among you who are single . . . If they are needy, God will make them free from want out of His grace. [Qur'an 24:32]

And He it is Who has created man from water; then He has made for him blood-relationship and marriage-relationship. And thy Lord is ever Powerful. [Qur'an 25:54]

One of His signs is this: that He has created mates for you from yourselves that you might find quiet of mind in them, and He put between you love and compassion. Surely there are signs in this for a people who reflect. [Qur'an 30:21]

In the context of praising the prophet preceding the Prophet Muhammad, the Qur'an reads:

And surely We sent Messengers before thee and appointed for them wives and children. [Qur'an 33:38]

And in praising the habits of good believers, it reads:

And those who say, "Our Lord, grant us in our wives and our offspring the joy of our eyes . . ." [Qur'an 25:74]

There are also many Traditions ascribed to the Prophet Muhammad in which the practice of marriage is emphatically praised. The following are some of these Traditions:

Marriage is my recommended custom. Whosoever turns away from my recommended custom is turning away from me.

Get married so you multiply. I shall indeed be proud of your multitude on the Day of Resurrection.

Get married, and do not divorce; indeed, divorce causes the Throne [of God] to shake!

O you young people, men and women! Whosoever can bear the

burden of marriage, let him or her get married. It [marriage] is indeed contentment to the eye and a protection to the modest parts.

When one is married, he secures half of his religion. So let him fear God in the other half.

ADVANTAGES

1. Procreation

This is the paramount advantage of marriage; namely, to contribute through legitimate means to the continuity and preservation of the human race. The sexual urge serves the function of bringing the mates together for the fulfillment of this basic objective.

The procreational objective has four aspects: to fulfill the will of God; to seek the love of the Prophet Muhammad; to benefit from the prayer of the child; and to profit from its intercession on behalf of its parents.

Almighty God, in providing the male with intricate fertilizing organs and the female with a receptive fertile womb, is telling us in the most eloquent but voiceless language of

the purpose of these provisions. To let them be idle is to ignore the divine wisdom written on these God-given instruments. Imagine a farmer who, although he is given a piece of fertile land, seeds and farming tools, just lets the land go to waste, the seeds rot and tools rust. This farmer not only is a fool, but is to be condemned for his wasteful and harmful indifference.

Procreation through marriage is also a means of seeking the pleasure of the Prophet Muhammad, peace and blessings be upon him, who is believed to be alive in his grave and to whom the deeds of the members of his nation are regularly presented. He has called upon his nation: "Marry, so your number increases. The practice of marriage is an answer to his call.

Prayer of a child is believed to be beneficial to his dead parent. The Prophet, peace be upon him says:

When the son of Adam dies, nothing would be of any more benefit to him except three things: a continuous charity, some useful knowledge he has left behind and a child who may pray for him.

Should the child die early and the parents accept its loss as an act of God, without despair, it would be like a ticket to Paradise for them. The Prophet, prayers and peace be upon him, is related to have said:

A child [who dies before reaching puberty] leads the parents to Paradise.

A child will be brought [on the Day of Judgment] and told, "Get into Paradise." But he will stand reluctantly and angrily at its gate and say, "I am not going to enter Paradise without my parents." It will then be said, "let his parents enter Paradise with him."

It is related that an unmarried man of good conduct who lived in the early

past shouted when he was rising from sleep one morning. "Help me to get married! Help me to get married. Maybe God will give me a child who will be useful to me on the Day of Judgment." He was asked, "What has happened?" He said, "I dreamt that the Day of Judgment had come, and all mankind was raised and brought together in one place with the burning sun close over their heads. Everyone became very thirsty and I was dying of thirst. Suddenly, children appeared among us, lively and handsome, covered with protective light and carrying silver ewers and golden goblets. They offered drinks to some but left out most. When I stretched my hand to one of them and said, 'Give me to drink, I am exhausted because of thirst,' he said, 'You have no child among us.' I asked, 'Who are you?' He said, 'We are Muslim children; our parents lost us when we were young!'"

2. Fulfillment of the Natural Urge

The sexual urge is perhaps the most powerful human inclination. It seems not to be an end in itself, but a means to bring the mates together for the purpose of fertilization. Yet its fulfillment is the most enjoyable and absorbing of human experiences. Failure to fulfill this urge is likely to lead either to deviation or to maladjustment. Deviation is dishonourable and is strictly forbidden in Islam. Therefore, the Prophet, peace be upon him, calls upon youth, saying:

O you young people! Whoever of you can afford to get married, let him do so. Those who cannot afford it, let them practice fasting, as it may be a protection to them [against sin].

It is believed that the intense pleasure of the climax of the sexual act, though short-lived, has the value of reminding the believers of the more durable and more perfect enjoyment that awaits them in Paradise. The experience should enhance their zeal to comply with divine teachings.

So the practice of marriage is the way to remove evil and protect against shameful failure. To try to suppress the sexual urge by other means, such as fasting, may succeed in preventing the eyes from looking at forbidden scenes and keeping the sexual organs away from committing heinous abominations; but there is no way of freeing the heart from engaging in meanest thoughts, pondering and dreaming of acts it craves for, even during the hallowed time of the performance of prayers. A person of any degree of respectability would never dare to speak openly of such mean thoughts to any creature, but he has no control over his mind to prevent it from roaming into these thoughts when he is addressing his Creator in prayers! Some cannot afford to do without women. Some also say that two-thirds of man's wisdom is lost when his male organ becomes erect. Al-Junaid, one of the major founders of the Sufi movement, used to say, "The sexual act is as important to me as food." And thus a wife is food for the man and a measure for purifying his heat. Therefore the Prophet, peace and blessings be upon him, commanded that whenever a man sees a woman and feels attracted to her, he should go and release his urge with his own wife in order to remove the evil thoughts from his mind. The Prophet sometimes added, "His wife surely can offer as much as this woman does." He also forbade visiting women when husbands are away. It is related that Ibn 'Abbas, a cousin of the Prophet, once noticed a youth

staying behind after a lecture he had given, when the other members of the audience had gone. When Ibn 'Abbas asked him about his problem, the reluctant youth complained that when he was overwhelmed by sexual excitement, he released himself by performing masturbation. Ibn 'Abbas was horrified and condemned the act, but said that the practice was less abominable than fornication.

It was because of fear of the danger which might arise from an unfulfilled sexual urge that the early Muslims did not hesitate to rush to new marriage once they became widowed. Imam 'Ali, cousin and son-in-law of the Prophet, remarried on the seventh day of the death of his wife Fatimah.

3. A Healthy Relaxation

In marriage there is comfort to the soul, there is beauty to look at, there is company, and there is play and joking and relaxation, all of which relieve the heart from its burdens and make the mind better able to concentrate during prayers and worship. To be always serious and deprive the soul of its joy is boring to the heart and could blind it. Relaxing through the company of the spouse is healthy; and that is why the Qur'an describes the spouse as a source of mutual comfort. It is said that it is wise to divide one's time over three types of activities: worshipping the Lord, self-examination and entertainment of the heart. The Prophet, peace and blessings be upon him, used to say, "Two worldly things are beloved to me: women and perfume; but the light of my eye is in prayers." It is related that Al-Asma'i, an ancient Arab philologist, once encountered a beautiful Bedouin woman in the desert wearing a red dress and holding worry beads in her beautifully henna-dyed hand.

Al-Asma'i remarked, "What a contrast!" meaning that the worry beads, a sign of deep religious devotion, and the henna dye in the hands, a popular cosmetic practice, did not go together. The beautiful righteous woman retorted poetically, "There is in me a devotion to God which I cannot neglect; but there must also be room for my heart and for my pleasure."

4. A Comfortable Home

Marriage, moreover, provides cooperation in the household and greatly relieves one from worries. Spouses cooperate in the management of the house, in its upkeep, in cooking and washing, and so forth. And thus there will be more time for worship and seeking knowledge, and a climate conducive to concentration. It is therefore said that a righteous wife is not a worldly asset only; she is a sure way to success on the Day of Judgment. The Prophet, peace be upon him, says:

Seek to have a grateful heart, a sweet tongue and a believing, righteous wife who would help you in your endeavor to success on the Last Day.

He also says:

If God loves a man, He give him a righteous wife. If he looks at her, she pleases him; when he is with her, she is marvelous company; and when he is away, she observes conscientiously his rights, protecting his property and preserving her honour.

5. Social Importance

Finally, by adding responsibilities upon the individual, marriage enhances his status in society and gives him an opportunity for training

in bearing the hardships of life. Living with a spouse, a person of different inclinations and background, trains one in accommodating oneself to new experiences; each party helps the other in the exercise of the virtues of patience and forbearance. The responsibility of rearing children and the need to earn for their living are added meritorious aspect arising from marriage. Listen to the Prophet when he says:

A man will be rewarded for what he spends on his wife, even for putting a morsel of food into her mouth.

He also says:

Whoever performs his prayers correctly, and spends on his children in spite of his modest means, and does not speak ill against others, will be in Paradise as close to me as these [two fingers of mine].

He also says:

Whosoever is given three daughters and spends on them and treats them well . . . surely God will reward him in Paradise.

DISADVANTAGES

There is no rose without thorns, and marriage is no exception. There is no relationship that modifies the mode of life of the individual or curtails the individual's freedom of action so suddenly or so profoundly as does marriage. Whether husband or wife, each has to take into account the reaction of the other party to whatever he or she may do.

1. Burdens and Risks

Upon marrying, the husband immediately carries the burden of the responsibility of his wife's welfare;

and each birth brings forth more burdens. Sickness and other crises which may occur to his wife or to any of his children will be his own problems, and many of the things he would be able to enjoy by himself may fall outside his reach because of his domestic burden. And thus marriage brings him both hardships and deprivations.

The wife also, in addition to her husband's demands, becomes exposed to the burden of pregnancy, the pangs of birth, child care and the heavy task of nursing her husband and children when they are sick. She has to do the shopping, prepare the daily meals, and wash and clean. She has also to pay regard to her husband's wishes and attitude. And so marriage for her is hard work and curtailment of her freedom.

Another disadvantage is the risk that marriage may prove to be a failure. If it is completely broken, then that is disastrous; and if it is maintained in spite of continuous troubles, life becomes hell. It is also likely in such a case of mutual tension that the parties behave unjustly to each other; and this will pile up sins for which they will deserve punishment on the Day of Judgment.

Moreover, the husband, in his search to satisfy the insatiable desires of an overambitious wife, or the needs of his children, may resort to corrupt or dishonest means, which would bring ruin to himself in this world and severe punishment in the life to come. The Qur'an remarks in this respect:

O you who believe, surely of your wives and your children there are enemies to you. So therefore beware of them.

[Qur'an 64:14]

Even if things proceed smoothly and comfortably in the household, the company of the wife and her

attractions may excessively occupy the time and thought of her husband; and she may become too often engaged in amorous activities with him. It is said, "Wisdom is lost between the thighs of women."

2. Refutation of Disadvantages

These seeming disadvantages may appear to outweigh the disadvantages, however, the burdened spouse is well compensated by the relief from the solitude and boredom of bachelorhood through the company of the other party and the children they both rear. Hardships they may suffer are worthy sacrifices in the interest of society. If everyone should run away from the responsibilities of marriage, mankind would degenerate, decline and ultimately disappear.

Engagement of the mind in the affairs of the household is not alien to the domain of divine worship. After all, the mind needs diversion and cannot easily be occupied in one type of work all the time.

The possibility of resorting to corrupt means to provide for domestic financial needs only arises with unscrupulous persons, married or otherwise; and marriage or need alone does not lead to corruption with conscientious, honest people. Married couples, however, should use their wisdom and manage their affairs within their means. They should not stretch their expenses beyond the income which they legitimately earn.

The possibility of failure in marriage is not a good cause for delay or reluctance. After all, there is a risk in every course of action in life, be it business, study, a journey or any other venture. If uncertainty of success were to debar us from venturing the risk, life would surely

become paralyzed. It is only in courage and challenge that individuals and nations can aspire to glory. Moreover, if due care is exercised in picking one's spouse, the possibility of failure becomes rather remote.