



Dwelling in Tranquility

By Imam Muhammad Magid with Samuel Ross

One of the greatest blessings God has showered upon His creation is marriage. Marriage sweetens our lives with love and friendship, comfort and security. It helps us to grow personally, anchors us in our society, and fortifies us in our deen. For these reasons and more, the Prophet Muhammad (salla Allahu ‘alayhi wa sallam) once said, “The whole world is a provision and the best object of benefit of the world is a good spouse.” However, marriage is also one of our greatest responsibilities. Though we may often quote the *hadith* narrated by Anas (‘alayhi rahmat) – “whoever marries has fulfilled half of his religion” – to encourage young people to wed, we must never forget the weight it also suggests.¹ Do we approach our marriages, current or future, as though they were truly half of our deen?

Let us take a moment to ask ourselves: “What exactly is marriage?” From an Islamic perspective, marriage is a mutual pledge that a man and woman make to one another in accordance with the Qur’an and Sunnah. Unfortunately, many Muslims ask for one another’s hands in marriage without understanding the terms of their request. In so doing, they are like the couple that leases an apartment or purchases a new car without reading the contract they have signed. If we are to experience successful marriages, we must be certain we know what the phrase “I do” really means.

Our scholars have identified at least ten mutual rights that all spouses possess. The first and most important of these is the obligation to treat each other with kindness and gentleness. Our words, actions, and behavior must always be suffused with mercy, love, and tenderness. Other obligations include justice, excellence, and protection. Summarizing the state of marriage, the Caliph Umar (‘alayhi rahmat) said, “Marriage is to be together on the best of terms or to go your own way on the best of terms.”

Another important question to ask ourselves is: “Why do we get married?” Let us take a moment to compile a list of some of the reasons we wed. Knowing the purpose of marriage is important because when we fulfill it, we automatically fulfill the terms of our contract as well. When we do not, we risk loosening the marital knot or letting it slip into divorce.

God says: “And among His Signs is this, that He created for you mates from among yourselves, that you may dwell in tranquility with them, and He has put love and mercy between your (hearts): verily in that are Signs for those who

1 Saheeh ul-Jaami, no.443

reflect” (Qur’an 30:21). This famous verse – often printed on wedding invitations – describes some of the wonderful purposes of marriage. The first aspect we might consider is the phrase “min ‘anfusikum” or “from among yourselves”. The word min in Arabic is used when something has been derived from something else, for example honey from the bee (16:69). In this regard, God suggests that we must ultimately view our mates as extensions of ourselves, and ourselves as extensions of our mates.

For in marriage there is no room for selfishness; we must consciously strive to walk the path from incomplete parity to one-ness. This path includes changing one’s vocabulary from ‘I’ to ‘we’, from ‘me’ to ‘us’, and making decisions together rather than individually. One scholar once remarked how wonderful it would be if couples addressed one another as “O, myself!”

Another aspect of this verse that we can consider is the phrase “‘azwajan litaskunu” or “that you may dwell in tranquility”. The word sakina in Arabic, or tranquility, derives from a root meaning “a place where one lives”. Take a moment to consider the many purposes of a dwelling. These structures protect us from the harshness of the elements. They permit us to relax and refresh ourselves. They enable us to be ourselves without having to worry about always looking our best. A good marriage should provide all of these same virtues. First, a husband and wife must protect one another from the harms of the outside world and most especially from the harms of one other. A marriage in which one member does not feel protected by the other is like a house in which the roof leaks, or worse, one that has a broken heating system in the depths of Winter! Second, spouses should always put one another at ease. They should be a wellspring of comfort, a source of love, affection, and support. Third, they must understand that while each will try to give his or her best in marriage, both must be free to be who they are without pretension. Strong marriages must be built on firm acceptance of the other, including all of their imperfections. Just as we do not have to wear our business suits to eat at the dining room table, we should not have to exert ourselves to interact with our spouse. By extension, we must never go into marriage thinking that we will change our partner, not only because this would be utterly beyond our capacity, as only God is al-Qadir, the All-Powerful, but also because it would create an environment of non-acceptance.

Much as our houses need occasional maintenance and inspections, so do our marriages. It is imperative that we check with ourselves and our other halves to see if anything is in need of repair. If so, it is crucial that we tend to these repairs immediately. As the common English expression goes, “the time to fix the roof is before it rains.”

In a beautiful passage, God gives another insight into the spousal roles: “They are your garments and you are their garments” (2:187). Why would God compare a husband or wife to a garment? Perhaps one compelling reason is that we wear our clothes very close to our bodies. Our spouses should be held similarly close to us and us to them, emotionally, physically, and spiritually.

Moreover, garments serve many purposes, from veiling our faults to preserving our modesty to accentuating our natural beauty. As spouses, we must seek to do so similarly by covering our spouse's shortcomings, preserving their privacy and dignity, and helping them to develop their innate talents and gifts. An important distinction, however, between clothes and human beings is that while we may have only one spouse in our lifetime, we often own many clothes, each for a different occasion and different time of the year. We may own suits for work and pajamas for sleep, jackets for winter and sandals for summer. As a spouse, we are only one person, and must adapt to all contingencies and all of life's seasons. Finally, we must consult and respect our spouse's "care label". Just as some clothes may bleed when washed in hot water or be ruined if not sent to the drycleaners, we must take the time to learn the best way to care for our spouse – something often unique to them and different from ourselves. As God says in the Qur'an: "O mankind! We created you from a single (pair) of a male and a female, and made you into nations and tribes, that you may know each other" (49:13).

In the Qur'an, God says: "And those who pray, 'Our Lord! Grant unto us wives and offspring who will be the comfort of our eyes, and give us (the grace) to lead the righteous / Those are the ones who will be rewarded with the highest place in heaven" (25:74-75). Let us strive to be the comfort of our spouses' eyes. Let us try to attune ourselves to the good in them, so that they may be the comfort of our eyes. Let us strive to be leaders of the righteous, for comfort can only come when we please the Creator of male, female, and love itself – God, the third party in all marriage contracts.

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Below is a list of things we can do to help improve the quality and intimacy of our marriages. Please feel free to cut them out and discuss them/practice them with your spouse.

1. Make du'a for your spouse to cultivate spiritual connection. Do this any time you think a negative thought about him or her.
2. Make time to eat an additional meal together.

3. Imagine yourself standing before God when He asks you if you treated your spouse in the best manner and if you fulfilled all of the conditions of your marriage contract.
4. Tell your spouse that you love them and tell them what you admire about them.
5. Hire a babysitter or take a vacation to spend more time together.
6. Read Qur'an together, pray tahajjud together, and/or make dhikr together.
7. Feel that God is watching over your marriage, listening to the words you say, and watching how you treat one another.□