

Family Life in Islam/ Women in Islam

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Introduction

I am known to many of my audiences in Cape Town as Muallimah (teacher) or Shaikha. I have pursued my Islamic studies in Cape Town under the auspices of various scholars and presently under the guidance of my husband who is my mentor and spiritual guide. My field of studies comprises Arabic, Sharia, Tafsiir (translation and commentary of the Holy Quran), studies in Hadieth (prophetic sayings), etc. I have also done computer studies and have trained many in this field. Apart from being an Islamic lecturer and a motivational trainer specializing in personal development, I also have a business background. I have produced just over five CDs on various aspects of Islamic life and have written and compiled a book on the significance of Ramadhaan within just over one year.

My involvement with Islamic education goes back almost fifteen years. My involvement with women and the rights of women in Islam remains high on my agenda, and I have delivered many lectures to various communities both Muslim and non-Muslim to highlight the proper and true perspective of women in Islam and to remove misunderstandings surrounding this delicate topic, which is either misconstrued or misrepresented. I have addressed many of the above subjects. To start off with my topic, I wish to open my lecture by quoting the noble verse from the Holy Quran. The Almighty Allah says in chapter Israa verse 70: "We have honored the children of Adam; provided them with transport on land and sea; given for them sustenance things good and pure; conferred on them special favors, above a great part of our creation."

Commenting on the above verse we understand the distinction and honor conferred by Allah on mankind are recounted in order to enforce the corresponding duties and responsibilities of man. He is raised to a position of honor above the brute creation. Should he then not realize his noble destiny and prepare for his real life in the hereafter? My paper here today could be categorized under the following:

- A. The family value system in Islam.
- B. The purpose of procreation and the benefits thereof.
Birth control and where it originated.
- C. The concept of family planning in Islam.
- D. Who is responsible for sustaining the family?
The role of the father, the role of the mother and the larger family.
- E. The Muslim home and it's function. What moral values should be imparted?
- F. Vital points for all families
- G. Summarizing speech

The Family Value System in Islam

How Islam Views Marriage

Family life is the basis of the Islamic society. It's origin goes back to the beginning of the creation of man and woman—Adam and Eve (A.S.). So it is an institution founded by God's will. Allah says in the Holy Quran, "Oh mankind, be mindful of your duty to your Lord who created you from a single soul and from it created it's mate and from the two created many men and women" (Surah 4 verse 1).

Marriage is the basis of the Muslim family. A good and sound society can only grow if a man and a woman is bound in a solid relationship through the sacred contract of marriage.

Marriage develops love and care and cooperation between the husband and wife. It gives peace of mind and provides a secure atmosphere for the growth and progress of the whole human race. Without marriage, the human race will come to a standstill. Marriage was a practice of most of the prophets including prophet Muhammed (PBUH). So much so that Prophet Muhammed (SAW) said, "Marriage is the way, and whoever turns away from my path is not from me." The prophet (PBUH) also said, "Marry so your number increases" (Documented in Abu Dawud).

Those who turn away from marriage will definitely not reap the bounties that marriage provides. Life for them will be uncertain, unstable as one is neither here nor there. Islam indeed frowns upon illicit relationships between men and women. It is indeed an abhorrent practice which Islam regards as unlawful and living in sin.

Children Out of Wedlock?

Lawful marriages are the unions of souls for love and procreation and family lineage and the legalizing of children. This is the practice and understanding of many faiths. If such a legitimate method of life is abandoned then the social structure of the world over will crumble. This indeed is reality. The fact is that in a promiscuous relationship many offspring don't know who their parents are. Is this what society wants to dictate to us? Children in these kinds of relationships have to bear the brunt of the irresponsible behavior of those who fathered them. In many cases, such parents either deny or refuse to acknowledge paternity. The purpose of the family structure is to recognize and honor the rights of each individual that exist in that family. Islam regards the institution of marriage and family as the highest institution because of the status it grants to a lawful matrimonial relationship.

The Purpose of Procreation and the Benefits Thereof— Birth Control and Where it Originated

Procreation is also one of the paramount advantages 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 object. The Quran states, Surah 16 verse 72, “And Allah has made for you mates of your own nature, and made for you out of them sons and daughters, and grandchildren” (and provide for you sustenance of the best.)

Love without doubt is the basis of all relationships. The need to belong, to be loved or to come from a mother or father is the natural inclination of man. We as Muslims would want to believe that Islam has and can contribute to finding solutions to all the social, financial, political, and moral decays of societies. When a man and a woman enter into matrimony, it gives value to their position in society as well as for their offspring. Their offspring could be a source of blessing for his parents in this world and in the hereafter. The prophet Muhammad (PBUH) said, “When the son of man departs from this world he leaves behind three things, viz, a continuous charity, knowledge which benefitted others, and a up righteous son/daughter who would remember and pray for his parents, and reminisce all the good times he had with them.” Is this not a wonderful feeling to know what you will leave behind one day?

We find Allah (SWTA) saying in the Holy Quran (Surah Nisaa verse 1, quoted earlier), and we gather the understanding of the holiness and significance a family holds in Islam. This verse was revealed at a time where women’s rights and the rights of their children were violated and families should be a source of passion, stability, friendship, companionship, mercy, tolerance, forgiveness, and reconciliation. These are all important aspects of a family structure that need to exist. The result will be ultimate tranquility.

On the other hand, repressing sexual desires leads to the decrease of the human race and its polarization. It also prevents the progress of civilization. In Islam, we regard celibacy as the unnatural way in the manner and purpose God the Almighty created mankind. Men and women have been designed by God to naturally be sexually attracted to one another. Sa’ad Ibn Waqqas reported that the messenger of Allah rejected the celibacy of Uthmaan Ibn Maz-un; had he given him permission, he would certainly have undergone castration.

The Concept of Family Planning in Islam

For man to exist it requires production or procreation through marriage. To have many sons and many daughters is high on the agenda of Islam in order to preserve the human race. It however allows the partners to plan the families with valid reasons.

Toward the end of the eighteenth century, Reverend T.R. Malthus, an Anglican clergyman and a world renowned English economist, was responsible for the founding of the birth control movement. During this period, the population of Europe was rising rapidly. In 1798, he published an essay on the principles of population as it effects the future improvement of society, where he calculated that the livable or habitable space on this planet earth was very limited, so were the resources provided for the human race. We wish to point out that statement is in contrast to the Islamic faith. We find Allah (SWTA) saying to us in the Holy Quran, Surah Hud verse 5, “There is not moving creature except by the word of Allah and with his knowledge. It’s maintenance in every sense is dependent on his will. The earth belongs to God and he decides who inherits it.”

Reverend T.R. Malthus argued that since the population is growing at a rapid pace, he therefore advocated reproductive control. It was, however, not contraceptives, but the age-old recipe of abstinence, *i.e.*, late marriage and restraint in matrimonial life. Not until Francis Place of France emphasized the utilization of contraceptive devices did this movement really swing into action. These views were forcefully supported by Dr. Charles Knowlton, an American author, in his book the *Fruits of Philosophy* in 1833, wherein the use and advantages of contraceptives were medically examined. These concepts failed the public because by this time the population and the economic resources also increased rapidly. Shortly afterwards in 1878, a campaign in favor of reproductive control was formed. Also in 1878, Mrs. Annie Besant produced her best seller *Law of Population*, which dramatically revolutionized the philosophy of birth control. All the countries of Europe and America were practicing it from 1881 onwards. By this time, social values and standards changed. An American sociologist, Paul H. Landis, said, summing up the whole problem, “Industrial society man has become extremely sophisticated about the matter of birth, parenthood, and fertility. Even sex has been divorced from fertility, in the sense that it’s primary function is no longer procreation but recreation.”

Islam though has been very accommodative in the aspect of family planning. It allows the couples to plan with a period of two to three years gap between each child in order to give the previous child his rights and to enable the woman’s rights as far as her body or health needs are concerned. Because child rearing is a collective exercise between spouses in most religions, it will not make the woman feel as if she carries that responsibility alone. The emancipated woman now becomes the victim of the vicious process of de-womanization. Women who are child bearers and rearers of children can enjoy the physical, personal, and social pleasures of life without feeling like an oppressed or compressed object. Materialistic greed also breeds selfishness and greed in the process of wanting

children. Many people would rather accumulate wealth for themselves than sharing it with their siblings. We can well imagine what the wealthy and the super wealthy can offer in a family with children if only they can realize the great contribution they can make in a family unit.

Who Is Responsible for Sustaining the Family?

The Role of the Father

Islam has given authority to the men/husbands as they are the overseers and caretakers of their families. The husbands are those who have to bear the responsibility of livelihood and to see to the well being of their family. The husband is responsible to see to the food, education, and health care, be the leader, the spiritual guide, the peacemaker, the politician, and the one who brings order in the home, etc. Allah [SWTA] says in the Holy Quran, Surah Nisaa verse 34, "Men are the protectors and maintainers of women, because Allah has given the one more [strength] than the other, and because they support them from their means."

The Role of the Mother

The wife has the responsibility of looking after the family. Although she is not obligated to, but out of love and care she would see to household duties, and rearing the children in a sound and healthy environment. In our society, the housewife is at times referred to as the "House Executive." The mother at home has all the time to see to the needs of her children. She cares for them, gives them love, affection, comfort, and solace. The home with the mother brings about stability, security, and tranquility. The mother at home gets that opportunity to spend quality time with her children and sees to their needs adequately. In Islam, the mother is the first educator of the child, due to the fact that she gets to spend most of the time with her children, while the father is at work.

On the contrary we find women, especially in the west, who are faced with a dilemma if they are to perform their natural function as desired by nature. Yes, many women are forced due to circumstances to seek employment in order to enhance their financial position but have to suffer the consequences of not being able to fulfill their proper "job" at home. Working women also have to endure all kinds of pressures. After all, how can a woman who has toiled all day be prepared to bear the burden of childbirth and the suckling of her infant? Most women do not have to work and do so for various reasons. Their absence at home in many ways contributes to the retardation of a sound functioning home. Imagine the kids coming home and having no father and no mother present. Would this not have a negative effect on the family structure in the long run? It is for this reason that Islam has placed the emphasis on the husband to be the provider for his household, and then in that way, the wife and all can execute their rightful duties and responsibilities.

The Muslim Home and Its Function—What Moral Values Should be Imparted?

What are the values that should be imparted from child to youth, from youth to adult? What is the ultimate purpose of possessing and acting on those values? For a Muslim to have high moral values is indeed imperative for his coexistence in this world, where he must know good from evil. The child is taught respect for parents, brothers, sisters, elders, extended families, neighbors, friends, and respect for mankind at large. The child is inculcated to exhibit good character and behavior at all times wherever he finds himself. The child is taught cleanliness of body, mind, and environment. He is taught to respect himself and others. He is not to mock other people nor any other religion. He should assist those in need and avail himself to others. He should respect his Muslim and non-Muslim neighbor. He must promote moral and ethical values at all levels, whether at work, school, sports clubs, community centers, or government levels, and play a pivotal role in society.

The prophet Muhammad said, "The best is he who is a benefit to mankind." The Muslim is expected to conduct himself in the best manner and to display his faith as expounded in the Holy Quran and Sunnah. Modesty and shame must always accompany him and guide him along the way, treating his employees with utmost respect, and rewarding them accordingly. A Muslim is just in his dealings and fair to all. A Muslim does not consume the wealth of another unjustly. A Muslim does not indulge in unlawful acts and is reminded to revere his creator at all times, thus being conscious that God is all knowing, all seeing, and aware of his doings. A Muslim does not harm others nor is he the cause of harm to others. A Muslim is to hold his parents in high esteem. He is not to sever his ties with them nor with any of his family members. In Islam the mother has been put on a high pedestal, so much that the prophet Muhammad said, "Paradise lies at the feet of your mothers."

A Muslim must always be the first to acknowledge his errors and the first to make up. The husband must honor his wife and treat her kindly. Respect is also extended to parents of the wife. His wife is not his slave. The prophet Muhammad used to exhort husbands to be kind to their wives and counted them among the best if they were. Muslims should not confuse their customs and traditions with that of Islam, lest Islam receives the blame for something it never sanctioned. A Muslim does not spread gossip, bribe, and waste his lawful earnings. A Muslim does not oppress or suppress others. A Muslim is he with whom other people are safe and protected from his hand and tongue. A Muslim safeguards the dignity and honor of another being. Life is sacred in Islam and has safeguarded its preservation. No one's life must be taken unjustly. These are the principles

that are to be taught and inculcated into the lives of our children, youth, and adults. For they are the future of tomorrow, and the generations to come. Understanding all this will better their outlook on life and bring about a coherent society, where differences amongst societies and religions will exist, but they can work together on those issues where they agree in order to bring about a better society for all.

Vital Points for All Families

John Masefield has said, "And he who gives a child a home, builds palaces in kingdom come." How important is my family to me? How is my relationship with my children? Am I interested in their personal problems or decisions? What is the future of my family and children in the following areas?

- Mentally
- Spiritually
- Socially
- Financially
- Physically
- Family Development
- How is leadership conducted in the family?
- How are family decisions made?
- How is the relationship between husband and wife?
- Do I have a strong family connection?
- Can I both give and receive love?
- Do I make responsible financial plans for the present and future?
- Do I prepare for parenthood?
- What are our present domestic circumstances?

Saying by Thomas Huxley

"Back of every noble life there are principles which have firmly fashioned it."

Summary

The family is the center of all centers and should be our greatest goal and aim in life. Life without a great goal is a life without a purpose. The greatest among us is always the readiest to serve and yet is unconscious of the service. Strong relationships in the family are the basis of a strong relationship outside the family. Plan to build and nurture them rather than leaving their development to chance. Lo, live fruitfully. We need to plan constructively. Therefore, if we fail to plan, then, indeed, we have planned to fail.