

بِسْمِ اللّٰهِ الرَّحْمٰنِ الرَّحِیْمِ

Hadith Umm Zar'

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Session 4

Wife 2 and Wife 3

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Wife No. 2

The second one said, 'I shall not relate my husband's news, for I fear that I may not be able to finish his story, for if I describe him, I will mention all his defects and bad traits.'

As the wives are not a 100 percent accurate in their descriptions, and their narrations are one sided, we will try to see the real story behind their words and deduce the other side of the story i.e. the husband's side from their words.

Refusal to describe husband

The first three wives complain about their husbands. Wife no. 2 states that she cannot talk about her husband. Why? Either she is too afraid to or there is so much to say that it would take too long. However as all eleven women promised to talk about their husbands, wife no. 2 gives a very short summary in which she states that husband has so many defects she cannot enumerate them.

Fear

The fact that this wife cannot speak out about her husband is because she is afraid of him. This alone is an indication of an unhealthy relationship. The relationship between husband and wife is not a relationship of a master and servant, or a relationship of fear, or of domination, but one of mutual respect and mutual support.

The innumerable defects of husband 2

In this story the wife says she will give an overview of her husband, and states that his defects are *ujar bujar* - external (*ujar*) and internal (*bujar*). *Ujar* refers to physical problems and *bujar* refers to mental issues such as how he view things, and analyses them. Overall he is very complicated, full of defects and psychologically sick.

Why stay in such a bad marriage?

The description of the husband is so bad, the question arises why his wife is still in this relationship? It is so unbearable, that she is afraid to even say anything as she fears she will land in big trouble. The word she used is vague and has multiple meanings.

Three common reasons why people stay stuck in bad marriages are:

- Fear of stigma and society
- For the sake of the children
- Financial dependence

She is so afraid that she doesn't want to leave him despite his defects. Why? Commentators suggest different reasons why this could be the case. She may have children and is afraid of losing them. Or she is still in love with him, despite his defects (which is less convincing) or she is relying on him financially (which is quite likely) and is therefore dependent on him.

This is a common scenario. If the relationship is purely financial this is problematic. You are building your future together, you are preparing for *Jannah* together so how much he gives her and how much she takes from him is not the point.

Sacrifice or suicide?

As she is not prepared to leave him, the wife is putting up with all these problems and issues as a form of self-sacrifice. Is sacrifice required in any good relationship or marriage? Yes, sacrifice in marriage is a good sign, it reflects loyalty and sincerity.

Is there a limit to sacrifice? In our community the boundary between sacrifice and suicide is blurred. It's very cloudy. Sacrifice and suicide are not the same. We need to distinguish between them.

When one's health or mental wellbeing is affected, then the relationship is no longer acceptable or healthy, whether it is wife or the husband who is suffering. When the relationship is costing one's mental state, it is a slow suicide. A sort of euthanasia. You are suffering acutely and this is not allowed. The bottom line is that there is a limit for sacrifice, and you need to distinguish between them.

The difference between fear and respect

There is a big difference between fear and respect. This wife is very fearful of her husband. And there are many husbands who are fearful of their wives. Fear does not constitute a healthy relationship. There has to be mutual respect but not fear in marriage. How do we keep respect? By keeping to the boundaries of the relationship. A good relationship has limits. Don't break them.

How do you improve respect?

Call you spouse by the best names. The names they like to be called, but make sure that you only call them these names in private. If you use them in public, it sets the partner up for ridicule, for example if a wife calls her husband little birdie in public he would be mocked.

In public, respecting one another is important. Don't criticise your spouse in public. Don't say 'He has this habit...' or 'Yesterday he did this' or 'She always does that!' Don't expose each other. This breaks their heart. It is exposing them. It is not respectful. Even as a joke it is not respectful. There is a limit to joking. Even in private. There are red lines even between husband and wife. (No go areas). For instance, his parents are a red line and vice versa. Do not mock each other's parents. It is not a joke, it can trigger animosity. We need to draw a line and know how to respect each other in public and private.

The cowardly wife

If the men being described in this *hadith*, had their chance, what would they say? The husband of Wife 2 might say his wife is very weak, probably pessimistic, unable to see goodness in anything, always collecting mistakes, unfair, lacking wisdom, and experience. She does not know how to deal with her husband and how to be close to him.

Her words indicate that she lacks confidence, and is always hiding. She doesn't want to tell him anything.

No one is purely evil

Is it possible that someone has no atom of good in their character, actions or words? No one is purely evil. This is what the wife is saying about her husband but it can't be a fair portrait. Though it is likely she has been hurt and affected by her. It does not mean she has no atom of goodness. Even the most evil people have some good in them. The wife is focusing solely on what is wrong with him, internally and externally. However in order to get the story right, we need to hear both sides. He might have goodness

in him, but she does not know how to extract it from him. She does not know how to unlock the gates in him.

How did you get in to this marriage?

You didn't know anything about him. You need to check before hand. Islamically we have the *khitbah*, it is not *nikkah* and it is not a stranger. It is in between she is fully covered but he can speak to her with the consent of both parents in the presence of a mahram at her parent's house, this is the classical way. She was thrown in the deep end. It works for some people but others sink. Some do not even know how to shout for help and will sink and die in their marriage. Marriage is not always doom and gloom but there is a lack of understanding about you can ask for in a marriage, we need to spell it out and draw the Islamic picture of where are the limits and rights ad obligations, etiquettes and prophetic practice.

Mirror to each other

The wife is saying that when her husband is full of complications, her life is also filled with complications and when he is full of defects, her life is full of defects; if he has internal and external problems, her life shadows these problems.

So why on earth is she still in this marriage? It is suicide. Because she cannot face the community and the stigma of being divorced, she is allowing herself to be killed. This does not just happen to women but i]]is often the case with the man, even today.

Had she tried a different style, perhaps she might have achieved a different result. I often ask men and women if they have tried methods or just assumed that you can't do it or that it won't work. Try. Ask the experts and those with experience to help you find a way to rectify and reconcile and to make your relationship better. If all the methods fail, then divorce is the last resort. It can be a relief for both partners and more importantly the children. Let them live a peaceful life rather than a battlefield.

Wife no. 3

My husband is a tall man; if I describe him (and he hears of that) he will divorce me, and if I keep quiet, he will neither divorce me nor treat me as a wife.

This wife only speaks one line. In the narration by Ya'qoub ibn al Sikkeet it says that she is very cautious of him, like someone who's next to a very sharp knife (or spear).

The tall husband

Is being tall a good or bad feature? Commentators have two different views. In general, being tall is considered a good feature. If you are sporty, then it is useful and at that time, being a tall warrior or wrestler gave one an advantage. But the context here suggests otherwise. The wife is being critical of her husband's height. Although he is tall, he is dumb, so she is not interested in his height. It is of no benefit to her.

The word used to describe him is *al ashanaq* the one who is extra tall. Some commentators say *al ashanaq* is someone who is not controlled but controlled. This means that he does not allow her to speak, and if she speaks she is very careful. She feels they do not have a good mutual understanding. She has no say in the marriage. It's his way or the high way. In other words, when you look at him, you may

be impressed by what you see but when he speaks you are not impressed by what you hear. He is all shape and no content. So she is very critical of him.

The dead end marriage

If you talk about something you dislike, or disagree with and he will divorce you he is not a reasonable person. Either way, *iskut wa alaq*, if she speaks the result is bad, if she stays silent she is stuck. She is between a rock and hard place.

Partnership not dictatorship

The husband has a bad character. He is a control freak, and this is not good in any relationship. There is no room for her to speak or express herself, which is not healthy in any relationship. Marriage is about mutual decisions, consent, respect and support, as well as intimacy, tranquility and peace. It's not a dictatorship. If the wife feels she can't speak, it indicates that husband does not allow her to speak. is wrong.

Why not end this marriage?

Why can't this wife free herself from a marriage which is full of suffering? Again, she is stuck probably because of her children, and trying to keep the family unit together, but too much sacrifice is not good. It destroys not just her but her children. This is not *sabr*. This is weakness. It brings suffering and pain to the children.

The commonality between the wife 2 and wife 3 is that divorce is too much of a stigma for them, which in Arabic is colloquially described as 'people will eat my face'. Remember this story is 1500 years old when the stigma was even greater. In general, her husband is not a reasonable man. He is dominating, dictatorial, tall but hollow from inside. And he is not looking after her as a wife. Hence she is *mualaqt*, i.e. 'hanging' neither looked after nor released from her marriage.

Anxiety

Being under so much pressure, the wife is always anxious. Her anxiety can lead to depression. She is lacking what every wife should receive from her husband: intimacy, financial support, good treatment, and a tranquil relationship. Her husband is dumb, psychologically and emotionally ill, and not treating her well. Why did she accept such a marriage? Why didn't she do her homework?

Honesty about medical conditions before marriage

If there is any medical history or a psychological problem in a family, it must not be concealed from prospective spouses. We are not talking about the flu or chicken pox, but concealing serious medical conditions is *haram*.

There are cases where the family never mentioned that the wife had a hole in her heart, which is a birth defect and she passed this congenital condition onto their son, whom the doctors said would not live for more than ten years. The father is living with the pain of this prognosis everyday. Fearing he will lose his son. It is a duplicitous not to disclose such information.

Why have children when a marriage is troubled

When a marriage isn't working, why would a couple have children? Some people hope their problems will resolve after they have had children, but this is not the case.

Can a woman leave an abusive marriage? Yes, she has a valid reason.

The husband's version?

Probably he would say she lacks self-confidence, she is very hesitant, she has a shaky personality. She is very cowardly, doesn't face her reality, and brushes things under the carpet. She postpones matters and doesn't talk about them. She always picks on the bad things.

Don't allow emotions to obscure your judgement

Can the husband have nothing that is worthy of praise? No. Emotions tend to overtake people, so they no longer see beyond the pain. For this reason, Allah Almighty taught us in Surah Baqarah to remember the good times even during the more bitter moments of divorce:

*And do not forget Liberality between yourselves. For Allah sees well all that you do.
(2:237)*

Allah Almighty is saying don't let your emotions block your judgement. We live by our principles, not by our emotions. Without doubt, emotions are important, but they are not a source of judgement. Justice is the source of judgment.

Allowing your partner express themselves

We need to give our partner the opportunity to speak, and to express themselves by listening to them. Sometimes we hog the discourse. We speak, but we need to learn how to listen. It's a skill we need to improve.

The Prophet (peace be on him) was the best at this. In Tirmidhi's *Shamail* we can see that he would listen until the speaker had finished. Then he would ask them if they had finished, and if they hadn't he would let them finish.

Sometimes because we were brought up with our family listening to us, we don't know how to do it. However, it is possible to learn how to listen and not interrupt. If you give someone an opportunity to speak but then keep interrupting them, they will not speak, they will shut down. And it is important that we should not listen to judge, but to understand.

I can assure you the bottom line of the conflict between a couple is communication. If they had good communication, they would have been able to solve their problems. Allah Almighty mentioned in the Quran that we should say what is the best, and how to be good in listening:

Those who listen to the Word, and follow the best of it. These are they whom God has guided. These are they who possess intellect. (39:18)

We ask Allah to enable us to follow His advice and the footsteps of the Prophet (peace be on him).
Ameen.