

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

Hadith Umm Zar'

Living Quran

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Seeing beyond the chip in your eye

The importance of family support in leadership positions

It is true, that behind every successful man is a woman. Wives 9 and 10 were both addressing their husband's leadership which also entailed their constant hosting and hospitality towards their guests. Finances aside, if a husband is engaged in reconciling between different parties, he cannot be fully focused on the task if his homelife is troubled. He needs the support of his family. If he has a nagging wife or a demanding family (not just normal obligations, but being burdened beyond reason by them) then he is not in a position to do this task properly.

Wives 9 and 10 were talking about their husbands with pleasure and mentioned their husbands' generosity, charisma and physique. They felt proud of them. They were not complaining but satisfied in their marriages, otherwise they, like the other wives, would have complained in the venting session.

Supportive spouse

It is not just wives who should support their husbands, but husbands should also support their wives when they are in positions of leadership. For example, she might be Prime Minister as Teresa May was, or the chancellor of a university or a consultant in her area of expertise, so definitely she needs the support of her family. There can be issues and jealousy can play a nasty role in creating a conflict between husband and wife.

Jealousy

I know someone whose wife is well known in the community so her husband is not known for himself, but as her husband and this annoys him a lot. Those with a big heart and big mind can deal with this wisely. Otherwise it troubles them and causes tensions in the marriage.

Be pleased with the success of your spouse – their success is your success and the success of the whole family, as is the success of your children.

One woman didn't want to be in the shadow of her husband and couldn't handle it, so she got a divorce and wrecked the family. It was chaos. If your spouse is in a leadership position it is not a competition. You should support each other in goodness and righteousness. In Surah Nisa, Allah Almighty says:

And live with them in kindness. For if you dislike them - perhaps you dislike a thing and Allah makes therein much good. (4:19)

This is a general call to support anyone doing something good. If that person is close to you, without doubt you need to support them and you will get a double reward - reward for support and reward for kindness because this relationship is based on kindness.

Don't focus on the negatives

Abu Huraira (Allah be pleased with him) reported Allah's Messenger (peace be on him) as saying:

A believing man should not hate a believing woman; if he dislikes one of her characteristics, he will be pleased with another. (Muslim)

This is a beautiful ayah and applies to women's attitude towards their husbands as well. The hadith is saying don't focus on aspects of each other that you dislike. A believer should not hate a believing woman, i.e. his wife. (And nor should a believing wife hate her husband).

Look at the bigger picture

If you hate something about your spouse, look at the bigger picture. Definitely there must more qualities you like in them, than dislike in them, so don't focus on the one thing that is annoying you. This is how the Prophet (peace be on him) taught us fairness.

A Shaykh once said when you focus on the one thing that you hate, it distracts you from seeing anything else. Just as if you stick a box of tissues in front of your eyes you will not be able to see anything else besides it. The Prophet (peace be on him) is saying that if you dislike something about your spouse, consider their positive aspects as well.

Be fair in your assessment of your spouse

Imam Nawawai commented on Sahih Muslim (in *al Minhaj*) that the wife might be vicious when she argues with her husband, or loud in her discussion but nevertheless she might be very kind or caring and loving in other ways. So do not sum her up by one bad quality/habit which she is not giving up. Be fair and judge her by her good and bad points together. Perhaps she prays, or he is generous and spends on his family, or picks drops the kids. But these get overlooked.

When I reconcile between couples, I often find wives have endless catalogues of grievances against their husbands. They drag up years of incidents that have upset them and are often unable to summarise their points. When pressed to list just three things that bother them, they have to think hard to limit themselves to only three things. They go on and on. But I need to understand what annoys them, not every tiny detail. Is it miserliness, for example? Unless one understands this, one cannot solve the rest. Then I ask the husband what three things he likes and dislikes about her. Only then does a balanced picture emerge.

Weighing up the good and bad

He might have some issues but weigh up the good and the bad and be fair in your judgement. If the bad outweighs the good maybe you can't take it. But if you zoom out you might realise that there is more good than bad.

Don't be consumed but what you dislike.

Once I was teaching a course and I was asked to judge between a couple. The wife's version made the man sound evil, but when the man spoke, he revealed that he did all the housework. I asked the wife if this true and she, 'yes. But...'. So I said what is the problem? There were some issues, but it was undeniable that he was not an outright evil person, but good and caring person.

Using kindness to address annoying habits

A spouse might have an annoying habit, such as smoking (not looking at it as halal or haram) but as a habit that is disturbing within their closeness, due to its bad smell. Try to make it better without mocking or criticising or ridiculing. These will escalate the problem and make it worse.

We need to understand how to be nice and kind to each other. The problem might require specialist help, a psychologist or counselling. The couple might need sessions to reconcile and to resolve their issues together. Don't point your finger at the other, as this will not change them. If you are sincere, support one another.

Sometime we are childish even as adults. We provoke our spouse. If that is the case, the partner does the reacts negatively. If you approach the problem in a nice way you are more likely to have success.

Once you have exhausted one to one discussion, then seek help. When you are treated you nicely, you can focus. If someone is nasty to you, you can't focus on your salah. Your day is ruined and mood is ruined. We need to be kind. That is why Allah Almighty says treat her nicely. Not just her, be nice to all humans.

You can't change someone til they are ready to change

If you want to change something about your spouse, first he needs to acknowledge that there is a problem otherwise no matter what you do, you will hit a brick wall. If he doesn't see a problem, his friends should be honest and help him see the problem. There is still no guarantee that this will change him, but you can try.

If he says 'I can't change. This is me,' then assess if you can live with this quality or not, or if you can help him improve it.

The one who's attitude is: 'Don't say this. This is me, take it or leave it' has an unwillingness to accept the problem. Instead, one should say, 'This is me but I'm trying'. At least be willing to be sincere in changing yourself.

A sincere person should be open for any change.

Some people might have lived with a particular trait for years, so to change them is not easy. Some issues can be changed through training and others are more difficult. If he's not bothered to change, what can you say?!

One difficult thing to change is when someone is convinced that he has been hard done by and unable to forgive others. Unless and until they realise it is not good for them to cling to this notion and it is against Quranic advice they will stay as they are. If they, on the other hand, believe they want to be among the best, rather than stay where they are, they can improve themselves. However, such people tend to justify their attitude and say they can't forgive the people who hurt them. This is not the right attitude. We can try to show them this, but we might not be the right person to show them. Sometimes, they are more likely to listen to someone else, who they respect and who is better suited to delivering your message to them. They will listen to them more. In Arabic we say people do not listen to the local person. They need someone from outside, even if he is limited in his knowledge to deliver the message.