

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

Hadith Umm Zar'

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Live Session

What is the definition of marriage?

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Understanding the deeper purpose of marriage and entering into it with the right partner



Allah Almighty mentioned in Surah Nisa:

But if you want to replace one wife with another and you have given one of them a great amount [in gifts], do not take [back] from it anything. Would you take it in injustice and manifest sin?

And how could you take it while you have gone in unto each other and they have taken from you a firm covenant? (4:20-21)

The Significance of the Firm Covenant

Without going into the *tafseer* of these verses, I want to focus on the phrase which Allah Almighty used to describe marriage, in last word of the ayah - *mithaqan ghaleedha*, or 'firm covenant'. The *mithaq* means covenant and the word *ghaleedh* means firm and strong. When you say a garment is *ghaleedh* you cannot tear it, cut it or shred it, as it's so strong. The marriage contract is thus a firm covenant. Though I memorised these verses a long time ago and repeated them many times, I only realised and appreciated just what a beautiful description of the relationship between husband and wife this is. It's not something we can dismiss lightly. It is not a joke. No. It is a very firm covenant. It cannot be treated with indifference.

In the other verse in which Allah Almighty used the word *mithaq*, in surah Ahzab, He described the covenant between Himself and the prophets (peace be on them) as a firm covenant. He said:

And [mention, O Muhammad], when We took from the prophets their covenant and from you and from Noah and Abraham and Moses and Jesus, the son of Mary; and We took from them a firm covenant. (33:7)

Allah Almighty used the same description here as in marriage contract! To draw our attention to the importance of the marriage contract: to protect, honour and preserve this covenant. And not allowing it to be abused or misused.

Covenant underpinned by kindness

But what is the definition of form covenant ميثاقاً غليظاً ?

Some scholars says: it's explained in the previous *ayah*: وعاشروهن بالمعروف

And live with them in kindness (4:19)

So firm covenant means: to treat each other with kindness, in good or bad situation even in *Talaq* divorce, as Allah Almighty says:

and do not forget to be graceful to one another. (2:237)

Requisite qualities in a life partner

Al Ghazali - though not all of his writings in his 'Book of Marriage' were fair or complimentary to women - should not be dismissed on this topic entirely as a result. In his *Ihya Ulum Uddin* he listed the good traits that make married life easy which should be manifested by husband and wife and if they are lacking, then misery would ensue. In women he mentioned 8 traits.

Accordingly the qualities an ideal wife should possess are:

1. *Deen*
2. Good character
3. Beauty
4. Low *mahr* - not over-burdening or exorbitant
5. Good fertility
6. Virginity
7. Good family
8. Not be a close relative

In the husband there are 11 aspects he should possess:

1. Provide a *Walima*
2. Sense of humour
3. Good leadership
4. Jealousy (with moderation) i.e. protectiveness towards his wifeⁱ
5. Spending
6. Education
7. Fairness
8. Good etiquettes
9. Able to have sexual relations
10. Good fertility

11. If he leaves her, he leaves with goodness not animosity.

Partner for life or partner to the afterlife?

The partner you choose is your partner to the *akhirah* - you support and carry each other to the hereafter. This is why when looking for the right partner it is very important to choose the right person. They come together and establish a family that will carry the principles of the *deen* and carry the message of the Prophet (peace be on him) to the next generation - this is the purpose of marriage.

Marriage is not an aim - it is a means to an end.

Often society mixes up the aim and means. Some people's target in life is simply to get married. Marriage is not an aim in itself. It is a means to become close to Allah Almighty. If someone is not able to find the right person or doesn't get married, they can become close to Allah Almighty in other ways. If they cannot married, this is one of the tests in life and it is hard. But they can still fulfil their purpose in life.

Choosing Mr or Miss Right

Why do people get into bad marriages without taking into consideration all the good and the bad aspects beforehand and then making informed decisions? Don't accept any proposal until you are satisfied. It will not be 100 percent what you are looking for, but there is no such thing as Mr Perfect or Miss perfect. Do not have unrealistic expectations. Don't seek the impossible or wait for Mr or Miss Perfect. They don't exist except in the *akhirah*. The main qualities in a husband are that he has *deen*, good character, is earning sufficiently, hard-working not lazy and not unattractive. Attraction is necessary, but this does not mean the right person is the most handsome on the planet.

The Test Drive

Islamically, before *nikkah*, couples should go through a period of getting to know each other before deciding to tie the knot. This period is know as the *Khitbah*. *Khitbah* is not a commitment. It is not a done-deal, as engagements are generally perceived by many Asians. Rather it is a testing time. A test drive. You can decide if the other person is your type or not, within *halal* parameters. It is usually 3-6 months, and could be up to a year, depending on the logistics and preparations.

Being upfront

When considering proposals, you have to be an open book. It is sinful to deceive someone into becoming your partner. Discuss your aspirations, relate your weakness and strengths. The partner to be needs to know everything about you. This does not mean opening your book of sins! No. But be sincere and serious.

If you hide something it will cause problems later. For example it is incumbent on both families to disclose any chronic or congenital medical diseases that run in them. The children

will inherit these conditions and it will break the spouse's heart when they find out. They will feel betrayed. This is *khiyana* deceit. In Lebanon it is compulsory to do a blood test before *nikkah* which is an essential element before the marriage contract goes ahead.

In the Asian community they haven't heard of *khitbah* they often jump straight to *nikkah*. In the Arab community, the *khitbah* is the period which begins with the permission of parents, who recite the Fatiha and it is under their guardianship that the couple can meet, and find out what they have in common and get to know each other.

Where can prospective couples meet?

In the West it is different from the customs in the East. It depends where you are. Without a *mahram* in a public place meeting is ok. But be careful to avoid any meetings which will lead to gossip and a loss of reputation. This is why Islamically, having the *mahram* on board protects one from gossips and backbiters. If you are meeting someone, you must tell you parents you are meeting. They have to know – otherwise they will receive a shock that when they hear from someone else that their son or daughter was here or there with so and so. Be honest with your parents. You might think they will not understand, but they will. Do the right thing. Do not jump into doubtful matters.

Being able to walk away when you feel it is not right

The *khitbah* is not a done deal. Islamically you are still free to get out of it. The lady doesn't need the man's *Talaq* divorce to leave the relationship as in marriage. Either party can walk away with no further commitment. Its better to have three broken *khitbas* then three *talaqs*. It saves a lot of trouble and heartache later.

Essence of a good marriage

In a good marriage the husband and wife mirror each other in goodness. The wife is a mirror to her husband and he is a mirror to her. This does not mean that they are carbon copies of each other, rather they complement and complete each other. They understand each other, and are most likely best friends, supportive of each other emotionally and physically. In matters relating to their home, they seek and respect each other's opinion, and make decisions collectively, but ultimately, the wife allows her husband to have the authority in the home to take the final decision. They are expressive of their love for each other, considerate of each other's feelings, and find each other attractive, taking care of their physical appearance for each other. Overall this is a tranquil home, in which the children feel secure, mirror their parents and respect their parents' authority.

Marriage is a firm commitment. It has to be entered into with thought and treated with the respect Allah Almighty honoured it with.

¹ It was narrated from Abu Hurairah that the Messenger of Allah (peace be on him) said:

There is a kind of protective jealousy that Allah loves and a kind that Allah hates. As for that which Allah loves, it is protective jealousy when there are grounds for suspicion. And as for that which He hates, it is protective jealousy when there are no grounds for suspicion. (Ibn Majah)

A man without jealousy is not a man. He should not want anyone to look at his wife or be close to her. This is HIS wife, not anyone else's! The covenant is to have access to one's wife or husband alone. Not anyone else. This is the limits of what is *halal*. Of course, jealousy should be moderate otherwise a man might not allow his wife to open a window or leave her four walls - this is OCD and needs to be treated.