The Family in Islam

Respect for Traditional Marriage Roles Bestows Lasting Family Stability

Dr. Muhammad Abdul-Rauf

The "Family" is a network of relationships, relationship between husband and wife, brothers and sisters, parents and children. These three ties are the basic elementary types of domestic relationships through which many other relationships are derived, including those between grandparents and grandchildren, close and distant cousins, uncles, aunts, nephews and nieces. The family is intact is not merely paternal or maternal. It recognizes ancestry on both sides, whether the family by tradition is patrilineal or matrilineal—or neither, as often seems to be the case today when newly married couples in modern times go their own way and whenever it is consistent to them.

The Husband's Duty

The importance of these relationship, conjugal or consanguineal, is that a relationship between each two persons so related gives rise to certain mutual rights and obligations. For example, according to Islamic law, a husband is fully responsible for the protection of his wife and for the cost of all her needs, even when his wife happens to be wealthy. She does not even have to contribute to the cost of his needs or those of her husband or her children unless she voluntarily decides to do so. Her husband has to provide the cost of her food, her clothes and her dwelling, as well as her other needs, including medical expenses. Her children are the responsibility of their father.

The Wife's Duty

A woman, in this sense, is an independently responsible agent. So long as she is sound mind and suffers no physical incapacity, she has the same obligations, be they religious, social or financial, as her male counterpart. Unless she is going through the monthly discharges or is within the postnatal blood period, she has to perform the five daily prayers, fast during the month of Ramadan and pay the obligatory alms if she owns the minimum limit of wealth in which such payment is required. She also has to make pilgrimage to Mecca at least once in a lifetime if she can afford it, but she does not have to make the journey except in the company of her husband or a male close relative like her brother or father, or a trustworthy group of people, such as passengers travelling by plane.

Once again, it is to be emphasized that a woman is a fully responsible agent. She is entitled to possess the fruit of her labor, to get engaged in any gainful pursuit and to choose the profession she prefers. It is her parents' obligation to provide her with the type of education they can afford to give her a good name at birth, and even to give her a party in her honor on the seventh day after her birth, for which a camel, a cow, or a sheep should be sacrificed according to their means.

The Female Child Saved

In Islam, in fact, beloved women from their pre-Islamic plight. We do not need to restrict the reader of how girls were treated in Europe during the Middle Ages. But in Arabia, before Islam, the birth of a daughter brought so much disgrace to her family that she was sometimes buried alive in a shameful customs which Islam successfully put to an end. The Holy Qur'an, believed by Muslims to be the Word of God, strongly condemned this custom with the following words:

> "When news is brought to one of them of the birth of a female child, his face darkens and he is filled with inward grief. With shame does he hide himself from his people because of the bad news he has had. Shall he retain it on sufferance and contempt or bury it in the dust? What an evil choice they decide on!"

"Arranging a Marriage"

The guardian of a girl—her father, or brother in the absence of the father—cannot give her away in marriage against her will. Her view of anyone who proposes to her should be duly considered, although the majority of the Muslim jurists are of the view that her guardian should go himself through her marriage contract, rather than herself, since this procedure is more in keeping with the honor of the girl, who is usually too young to properly decide her approval of marriage, especially when she is getting married for the first time. Therefore, immediately before the marriage contract is proceeded with, she is to be asked to express her own wishes, namely approval or disapproval of the marriage. If she is still a minor, her opinion is regarded as silent approval. But if she has been married earlier but was separated by divorce or death from her first husband, she must be asked to categorically indicate her approval. The bridegroom has to pay her a suitable dower as an indication of respect of her dignity.

The vow of the day preceding the wedding is called "The Henna Night." That night—and indeed the preceding nights for a week or even much earlier—is celebrated with many gatherings of traditional innocent songs to the tune of small drumming and sometimes dance. The closer the wedding day, the more intensified the celebrations become.

On the Henna night, both bride and bridegroom have their hands and feet dyed with henna, each still living in his and her respective homes. During the weeks preceding the wedding, the groom often pays visits to his bride. As soon as his designated bride hears his voice, she is supposed to go away and hide somewhere or account of disgrace. He usually brings along gifts to his bride and in laws, besides a formal gift to the groom usually extends to his bride on the time of making his proposal of marriage. Nowadays this is a gold ring with his name engraved on it. He usually provides another ring with her name engraved on it as well. The ceremony of the exchange of wedding rings is customarily called "her engagement party."

Traditionally the bride's family provides household articles needed for use by the newly married couple, but that custom is now changing. The couple nowadays takes care of its own needs.

What's Leadership Role

In a Muslim domestic household, authority is normally vested in the husband, who was and still is responsible for the protection and upkeep of his wife and children. Such a role is consistent with physiological and anthropological realities. This arrangement provides an outlet for the male ego and innate aggressiveness. On the other hand, the wife's role of receiving and comforting her husband conforms with physiological and anthropological realities. This arrangement provides an outlet for the male ego and innate aggressiveness. On the other hand, the wife's role of receiving and comforting her husband conforms with physiological and anthropological realities.

Once again, it is to be emphasized that a woman is a fully responsible agent. She is entitled to possess the fruit of her labor, to get engaged in any gainful pursuit and to choose the profession she prefers. It is her parents' obligation to provide her with the type of education they can afford to give her a good name at birth, and even to give her a party in her honor on the seventh day after her birth, for which a camel, a cow, or a sheep should be sacrificed according to their means.

Respect for Traditional Marriage Roles Bestows Lasting Family Stability

Dr. Muhammad Abdul-Rauf

The "Family" is a network of relationships, relationship between husband and wife, brothers and sisters, parents and children. These three ties are the basic elementary types of domestic relationships through which many other relationships are derived, including those between grandparents and grandchildren, close and distant cousins, uncles, aunts, nephews and nieces. The family is intact is not merely paternal or maternal. It recognizes ancestry on both sides, whether the family by tradition is patrilineal or matrilineal—or neither, as often seems to be the case today when newly married couples in modern times go their own way and whenever it is consistent to them.

The Husband's Duty

The importance of these relationship, conjugal or consanguineal, is that a relationship between each two persons so related gives rise to certain mutual rights and obligations. For example, according to Islamic law, a husband is fully responsible for the protection of his wife and for the cost of all her needs, even when his wife happens to be wealthy. She does not even have to contribute to the cost of his needs or those of her husband or her children unless she voluntarily decides to do so. Her husband has to provide the cost of her food, her clothes and her dwelling, as well as her other needs, including medical expenses. Her children are the responsibility of their father.

The Wife's Duty

A woman, in this sense, is an independently responsible agent. So long as she is sound mind and suffers no physical incapacity, she has the same obligations, be they religious, social or financial, as her male counterpart. Unless she is going through the monthly discharges or is within the postnatal blood period, she has to perform the five daily prayers, fast during the month of Ramadan and pay the obligatory alms if she owns the minimum limit of wealth in which such payment is required. She also has to make pilgrimage to Mecca at least once in a lifetime if she can afford it, but she does not have to make the journey except in the company of her husband or a male close relative like her brother or father, or a trustworthy group of people, such as passengers travelling by plane.

Once again, it is to be emphasized that a woman is a fully responsible agent. She is entitled to possess the fruit of her labor, to get engaged in any gainful pursuit and to choose the profession she prefers. It is her parents' obligation to provide her with the type of education they can afford to give her a good name at birth, and even to give her a party in her honor on the seventh day after her birth, for which a camel, a cow, or a sheep should be sacrificed according to their means.

The Female Child Saved

In Islam, in fact, beloved women from their pre-Islamic plight. We do not need to restrict the reader of how girls were treated in Europe during the Middle Ages. But in Arabia, before Islam, the birth of a daughter brought so much disgrace to her family that she was sometimes buried alive in a shameful customs which Islam successfully put to an end. The Holy Qur'an, believed by Muslims to be the Word of God, strongly condemned this custom with the following words:

> "When news is brought to one of them of the birth of a female child, his face darkens and he is filled with inward grief. With shame does he hide himself from his people because of the bad news he has had. Shall he retain it on sufferance and contempt or bury it in the dust? What an evil choice they decide on!"

"Arranging a Marriage"

The guardian of a girl—her father, or brother in the absence of the father—cannot give her away in marriage against her will. Her view of anyone who proposes to her should be duly considered, although the majority of the Muslim jurists are of the view that her guardian should go himself through her marriage contract, rather than herself, since this procedure is more in keeping with the honor of the girl, who is usually too young to properly decide her approval of marriage, especially when she is getting married for the first time. Therefore, immediately before the marriage contract is proceeded with, she is to be asked to express her own wishes, namely approval or disapproval of the marriage. If she is still a minor, her opinion is regarded as silent approval. But if she has been married earlier but was separated by divorce or death from her first husband, she must be asked to categorically indicate her approval. The bridegroom has to pay her a suitable dower as an indication of respect of her dignity.

The vow of the day preceding the wedding is called "The Henna Night." That night—and indeed the preceding nights for a week or even much earlier—is celebrated with many gatherings of traditional innocent songs to the tune of small drumming and sometimes dance. The closer the wedding day, the more intensified the celebrations become.

On the Henna night, both bride and bridegroom have their hands and feet dyed with henna, each still living in his and her respective homes. During the weeks preceding the wedding, the groom often pays visits to his bride. As soon as his designated bride hears his voice, she is supposed to go away and hide somewhere or account of disgrace. He usually brings along gifts to his bride and in laws, besides a formal gift to the groom usually extends to his bride on the time of making his proposal of marriage. Nowadays this is a gold ring with his name engraved on it. He usually provides another ring with her name engraved on it as well. The ceremony of the exchange of wedding rings is customarily called "her engagement party."

Traditionally the bride's family provides household articles needed for use by the newly married couple, but that custom is now changing. The couple nowadays takes care of its own needs.

What's Leadership Role

In a Muslim domestic household, authority is normally vested in the husband, who was and still is responsible for the protection and upkeep of his wife and children. Such a role is consistent with physiological and anthropological realities. This arrangement provides an outlet for the male ego and innate aggressiveness. On the other hand, the wife's role of receiving and comforting her husband conforms with physiological and anthropological realities. This pattern or relationship, however, should have a degree of flexibility within which the couple may adjust its special needs according to the circumstances. So the roles played by each of the married couple within the family structure are reciprocal and complementary. If the husband is a professor or a renowned politician, his wife, with her chivalrous nature, is by no means less honorable. Sex role differences should not entail a position of inferiority or superiority.
Islamic Family Principles

In a Muslim domestic setting, the following principles operate:

1. The couple and their children, if any, form a human cooperative team in which the husband is the leader, with no implication of superiority, and the wife is the lieutenant and gentle executive of the team.

2. Love and mutual care, and consent, as well as serious honest contributions, are the underlying elements in the relationship.

3. The husband should entrust his life to God when the husband and wife live in a family relationship.

4. The husband should always be ready to marry another woman when married to the wife. There is no prohibition of the family's leadership.

5. The husband, when the wife submits to the guidance of the caliphate, has the right to give her a divorce. If the husband gives her a divorce, he must write, "Accept the Holy Qur'an, you can kill my love for you. And you shall not return to me until I am in a merciful state."

6. A wife should acquire the knowledge to provide a climate of peace at home, and to maintain the domestic dwelling a warm nest to which her husband and children eagerly return from their outside activities.

7. The wife should be given all a chance to share in reforming the policies affecting the family's life.

8. The most growth and well-being of the children in general should be the mutual responsibility of all the parties involved.

9. And family, the sentiments of sympathy, kindness, concern, patience, forbearance, forgiveness, generosity and understanding should saturate the domestic climate.

Women in Family Life

Success of the family in realizing its objectives and functions as a productive social unit, providing happy companionship and effectively rearing its young ones, depends on conformity with the above observations, which are implicit in the Holy Qur'an and were taught by the Prophet Muhammad, peace and blessings be upon him. Let us quote here the following hadiths:

1. The Prophet is asked him, "Do you have other children?" "Yes," replied the man. The Prophet asked further, "Are you giving each one of them a gift?" The man answered, "No." The Prophet, peace and blessings be upon him, then responded, "I do not bear witness to an injustice." 3

2. The Children of Islam

Children, too, should be treated equitably. Favoring one over the others provokes jealousy which is harmful and destructive. Once, a man went to the Prophet and requested that he be witness that he had given his son an orchard as a gift. The Prophet, peace and blessings be upon him, asked him, "Do you have other children?" "Yes," replied the man. The Prophet asked further, "Are you giving each one of them a similar gift?" The man answered, "No." The Prophet, peace and blessings be upon him, then responded, "I do not bear witness to an injustice." 3

The Significance of Family

In conclusion, we may safely say that the institution of the family provides its members with a sense of belonging and interdependence and inspires each one of them with a feeling of being wanted. The family coordinates the work and the activities of its members. Through the family, the individual satisfies his biological and psychological needs: food, clothes, shelter, sex, protection and security. The family provides for the young ones, while teaching them the social and cultural heritage. The parents willingly and lovingly take care of their baby, clean its dirt without complaint, feed it day and night, and protect it from all harm. The young ones provide hope for the future, and ensure the continuity of their kinship. Moreover, the family makes a fundamental contribution to society through its reproductive function in perpetuating the existence and expansion of the human race and the human culture.

The Children of Islam

Children must be treated equitably. Favoring one over the others provokes jealousy which is harmful and destructive. Once a man went to the Prophet and requested that he be witness that he had given his son an orchard as a gift. The Prophet, peace and blessings be upon him, asked him, "Do you have other children?" "Yes," replied the man. The Prophet asked further, "Are you giving each one of them a similar gift?" The man answered, "No." The Prophet, peace and blessings be upon him, then responded, "I do not bear witness to an injustice." 3

The Significance of Family

In conclusion, we may safely say that the institution of the family provides its members with a sense of belonging and interdependence and inspires each one of them with a feeling of being wanted. The family coordinates the work and the activities of its members. Through the family, the individual satisfies his biological and psychological needs: food, clothes, shelter, sex, protection and security. The family provides for the young ones, while teaching them the social and cultural heritage. The parents willingly and lovingly take care of their baby, clean its dirt without complaint, feed it day and night, and protect it from all harm. The young ones provide hope for the future, and ensure the continuity of their kinship. Moreover, the family makes a fundamental contribution to society through its reproductive function in perpetuating the existence and expansion of the human race and the human culture. The family is therefore regarded as the building block of society.

Notes: