

TALK FOR AN ISLAMIC WEDDING

By Tariq Mustafa

Ever since opening their eyes mankind has thought about various matters and come to different conclusions. For example on the subject of marriage or sexual relations most of the religions like Christianity, Buddhism and many others permit such relationship amongst ordinary humans but when it comes to people who want to get especially close to God or to dedicate their life to His cause i.e. Priests, Sadhus etc who they are not permitted to marry. Somehow the impression is that even lawful sexual relations keep a person away from getting close to God. Looked at superficially this view seems to make some sense, but is it in accord with human nature?

Guidance of Quran and life of our illustrious Prophet tell us that such thinking is not in line with human nature and has misled mankind. Quran tells us categorically that marriage is fully in accord with our nature and in fact saves the parties from straying into wrong paths and thus is highly recommended.

"And one of Allah's signs is that he has created for you mates from yourself - that you may dwell in tranquillity with them and has ordained between you love and mercy "

(Sura Al Roum 30:21)

The Holy Prophet is reported to have said that "anyone who has the means to do so should get married because it helps in following the Quranic injunction of keeping one's eyes lowered"

Marriage is a natural act without which mankind will not grow in a lawful manner. Sexual relations are essential for procreation and growth of the human race and they also help in maintaining balance of body as well as the mind. Precisely because mankind cannot grow without sexual duplication this act has been made very attractive and appealing for the participants. There is nothing wrong or demeaning about it so long as it is handled in the proper relationship i.e. inside marriage where the two sides have entered into a contractual relationship to succour and support each other and to look after the children, which are the likely outcome of the sexual relationship

Logical consequence of the above is that this sex drive which has been made so attractive, appealing and almost overpowering should not be unnecessarily stimulated through acts such as close contact with opposite sex, dancing, revealing dresses even suggestive music and all those activities and techniques which have so cleverly been invented and are being ingenuously developed by the exploiters and practitioners of this human propensity. The real need is to keep this strong natural desire in check and keep it channelled in a healthy and constructive direction and hold it under a proper leash, like we would do to keep a headstrong horse under control. Another example would be a car going downhill. A prudent driver will keep his foot on the brake and not the accelerator.

The same strong sexual drive seems to hold in the animal kingdom, again because it is needed for the preservation and growth of the species. The control there is built in by nature through the cycle of "Heats" which govern animal behaviour. The animals are driven to engage in sexual activity during the cycle but lose interest in it at other times. Thus the required balance is dictated by natural laws and animals are spared this overpowering stimulation and "modern marketing "of sex that we humans have to withstand. History shows us that this tendency towards stimulation of sexual appetite and violence, which is being increasingly displayed by Hollywood, generally feeds upon itself. Each successive generation has to outdo its predecessors, as was seen in the classical Roman fora, and this invariably leads to increasing doses of sex and violence leading eventually to more and more of the

same as we are seeing in the drift towards homosexuality and deviant behaviour of various types being exhibited today.

Quran declares mankind to be "Ashraf ul Makhlookat" i.e superior amongst creation. They have been given freedom of action in keeping with this status and not made subservient to various instincts like the animals described above. Man has been given the wisdom to distinguish Right from Wrong. While Man is free to choose his course the Quran warns him that he is also accountable for his deeds and will have to face the consequences of his choices. This is the inexorable Law of nature to which mankind is fully subject

Al Quran tells us what is best for mankind when faced with this situation. It states very clearly that the headstrong sexual drive must be kept in check, in our own interests; it must not be allowed to get the better of us. Quran, in its inimitable way goes on to give a simple prescription on how to achieve such control. It urges women to cover their attractive parts and urges men to keep their gazes lowered. Could one think of a better way of conveying guidance in one short sentence? It does not go into specifying what constitutes attractive parts - because they vary from culture to culture. But the bottom line has been made crystal clear i.e. avoid stimulation except under allowable conditions i.e. wedlock, where the restriction does not apply

Al Quran tells us that sexual relationship is a natural act, which does not stand in the way to achieve closeness to the Creator. It is wholesome and permissible for all human beings, not only laity but including those who want to dedicate their lives to God (There is no priesthood in Islam and it considers monks etc to have gone to the extreme and forbidden themselves what was allowed and permitted by God) However it directs that this powerful sex urge must be kept strictly within the bounds of marriage and all unlawful stimulation must be avoided to help keep this urge in check. The Western world which has been so successful in controlling the forces of nature through use of the scientific method and their effective management techniques, has chosen the wrong path concerning relations between the sexes, as so succinctly advised by the Quran. They are unfortunately moving in the opposite direction by legalizing homosexuality, talking of single parentage etc which inevitably would lead to weakening of the family system and the spread of diseases unheard of before (Does Aids ring a bell?)

RIGHTS OF WOMEN

From time immemorial, man because of his superior physical and bodily strength, has managed to exploit women. Quran makes a special note of this and draws our attention towards the rights of women and the need to be gentle towards them. This objective cannot be achieved by legislation alone. While legislation would certainly help, it is hardly enough because its reach is limited and it cannot easily penetrate the bedroom. The problem really is one of "attitudes" and of correctly programming the "brute" in men by inculcating the right attitudes from childhood. It may come as a surprise to many that these incorrect attitudes about women are implanted in the minds of men, often, by none other than their mothers, because of prevailing social mores

AL Quran clearly states that both men and women have rights over each other. In essential and fundamental matters such as having a personality, a soul, an afterlife etc both are absolutely equal. Both are free but accountable for their deeds, which will determine their recompense in the hereafter, and man has no advantage there over women whatsoever, according to the Quran. However their roles and duties in this world are not identical and reflect their physical and to a lesser extent their mental makeup as well as the role played by the respective sex in history of the development of mankind spanning millions of years

The role given by nature to man, for which he has been equipped and optimized over the years is one of a provider and defender of the family which is the basic unit of Society (not unlike that of an atom being the basic unit of an element) The normal role of the woman is primarily to look after the mental and bodily development of the children and to look after the needs of the family in their house. (Let it

be clarified that this should not be taken to be a routine and boring task with little challenge or intellectual content) In fact if done properly it will require development of the full human potential of the women of all their faculties. While both parents are responsible for the proper education and development of the children the woman has a greater role and impact, for the simple reason that it was she who bore the child in her womb and suffered the birth pangs and spends much more time with the children particularly in their early years, which modern psychology tells us are the real formative years especially of the human psyche. It follows that the mothers need to be properly trained and equipped for this important and critical task

Al Quran refers to the man-woman relation characteristically in a very novel and innovative manner. It states that men and women are like the two wheels of a cart. Without either one the family cart will not move forward smoothly. At another place Quran says that men and women are like raiment of each other (see 2/187) it would be instructive to remember the important role that raiment (clothing) plays in our life. It provides protection, comfort, beauty and also coverage of defects and imperfections. So this is the role Quran prescribes for the partners who should be all this and more for each other. It is truly a partnership bringing out the natural strength and specialization of each in a win win relationship for the family, the community and eventually the human race.

Our beloved Prophet summed up the importance of the rights of women in his own inimitable fashion. Addressing his companions, according to Tirmidhi, he is reported to have said, "that the best amongst you are those who look after their wives well"

May the Almighty sensitize us to the above instructions so that we may live up to these commandments and find the best, both in this world as well as the hereafter - Amen.

"O men we created you from a single pair of male and female and made you into nations and tribes so that you may know each other and not that you may despise each other. Verily the most honored of you in the sight of Allah is he who is the most righteous of you"

(Quran 49:3 Cf. 4:1)

" I waste not the labor of any that labor amongst you be you male and female, the one of you is from the other "

(Quran 3:195 and 9:71)