



HANDBOOK
— OF A —

HEALTHY MUSLIM MARRIAGE

UNLOCKING THE SECRETS
TO ULTIMATE BLISS

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White Thread
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CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION	13
1. MARRIAGE AND FAMILY LIFE IN ISLAM	19
The Purpose of Marriage	19
Love and Kind Treatment in Marriage	22
The Weight of Marriage	26
Marriage in Our Times	27
2. PREPARING FOR MARRIAGE	31
Practical Steps to Prepare for Marriage	32
When to Get Married	33
Intentions for Marriage	36
3. WHAT TO LOOK FOR IN A SPOUSE	39
Wealth	40
Lineage	41
Beauty	43
Religion	45
What to Look for in a Husband Then?	47
Other General Qualities	49
Cultural Compatibility	52
4. HOW TO FIND A SPOUSE	59
Identifying a Potential Spouse	61
Involvement of Parents	63
What Is Love and Falling in Love?	69
Taking Things Forward	70
The Background Check	71

	The <i>Istikhāra</i> Prayer	72
	The Family Meeting	74
	Discussion with the Prospective Spouse	77
5.	THE MARRIAGE CONTRACT AND WEDDING CEREMONIES	83
	Engagements	83
	<i>Nikāḥ: The Sunna Way</i>	85
	The Marriage Contract	88
	The <i>Mahr</i> (Dowry)	90
	<i>The Mahr of Fāṭima or the Mahr of the Prophet's Wives ﷺ?</i>	91
	The <i>Jahēz</i>	93
	The <i>Walīma</i> and Wedding Parties	94
	Taking the Husband's Surname	98
6.	BUILDING A SUCCESSFUL RELATIONSHIP	101
	Love, Piety and Blessing as the Foundation of Marriage	102
	The Marriage Dynamic	106
	General Advice for a Successful Marriage	108
	Character and Religious Commitment	109
	Companionship	110
	Social Skills and Communication	112
	Compassion and Mercy	119
	Advice for Husbands	122
	Advice for Wives	125
7.	SEXUAL INTIMACY, ROMANCE AND ETIQUETTE	129
	Intimacy in the Honeymoon Phase	131
	The First Night	131
	Romance	134
	Public Displays of Affection (PDA)	135
	The Sexual Needs of Women	136
	The Sexual Needs of Men	144
	Problems in the Bedroom	147
8.	THE WIDER FAMILY UNIT: CHILDREN AND IN-LAWS	153
	In-laws	153
	Children	161
	<i>Steps to Having Pious Children</i>	164
	<i>Should the Father Be Present During Childbirth?</i>	166

9. DEALING WITH MARITAL PROBLEMS	169
Communication Problems	170
Money Problems	175
Problems in Sexual Intimacy	178
Flirtation, Infidelity and Promiscuity	183
The Thorny Issue of Polygamy	188
Infertility	192
Holistic Treatments	196
Domestic Violence	200
Overcoming Marital Problems	205
10. DIVORCE	209
The Social Stigma of Divorce	211
The Painful Reality of Divorce	214
Parents Asking You to Divorce	216
Avoiding Divorce	216
Divorce Should not Be in Your Vocabulary	217
Divorce and Anger	220
The Basic <i>Fiqh</i> of Divorce	223
<i>The Words of Divorce</i>	224
<i>The Categories of Figurative Statements and their Contexts</i>	226
<i>The Revocable Divorce</i>	227
<i>The Irrevocable Divorce</i>	228
<i>The Third and Final Divorce</i>	229
The “Three Equals One” Issue	232
<i>Divorce during Menstruation and Pregnancy</i>	233
The <i>Khul'</i>	234
The Parting Gift of Gratification (<i>Mut'ā</i>) and Financial Settlements	236
The Waiting Period (<i>Idda</i>)	237
Custody Issues	239
The <i>Fiqh</i> of Custodial Rights	243
Child Maintenance	246
CONCLUSION	249
Husband and Wife in Paradise	250
BIBLIOGRAPHY	257

وَمِنْ آيَاتِهِ أَنْ خَلَقَ لَكُمْ مِنْ أَنْفُسِكُمْ أَزْوَاجًا لِتَسْكُنُوا فِيهَا
وَأَجْعَلَ بَيْنَكُمْ مَوَدَّةً وَرَحْمَةً إِنَّ فِي ذَلِكَ لَآيَاتٍ لِقَوْمٍ يُفَكِّرُونَ

And of His signs is that He created for you from yourselves mates that you may find tranquillity in them; and He placed between you affection and mercy. Indeed, in that are signs for a people who give thought (Rūm, 30:21).







INTRODUCTION

﴿وَلَقَدْ أَرْسَلْنَا رُسُلًا مِّن قَبْلِكَ وَجَعَلْنَا لَهُمْ أَزْوَاجًا وَذُرِّيَّةً﴾

We sent messengers before you and gave them wives and offspring (Ra'd, 13:38).

IN THE NAME OF ALLĀH Most Gracious Most Merciful. All praise is due to Allāh, whose subtle bounties shower down upon the worlds, and whose servants receive them one after another willingly or unwillingly. Among His blessings is that He has created human beings from mere fluid, then made them kin by blood and marriage. He has placed sexual desire in them and inspired them to sow their seed and seek progeny. He has raised up lineage and granted it a lofty status. He has rendered unlawful all fornication and made clear its detriment and repugnance. He has encouraged marriage and promised great reward for it. Finally, He has ordained that all creatures depart this world, but plant their seeds to bring about a new generation to replace those He calls back.

All praise and blessings be showered upon His beloved Messenger, whom He appointed to teach, warn and give glad tiding, who was the most excellent of husbands to his wives, and upon his pure family, esteemed companions, and all those married couples striving to follow his way of excellence.

The institution of marriage is a pillar of a successful society. The relationship between a husband and wife allows them to strengthen and support one another, to grow, to develop and to find peace and

sanctuary. It allows children to enter the world and to be brought up in an environment of safety and security so that they will grow to be upright members of society. Marriage is integral to the Islamic tradition and plays a huge part in the spiritual life of both the individual and the community. The Prophet ﷺ said, “When a person marries, half of his religion has been completed. He should now be mindful of Allāh regarding the other half” (Bayhaqī, *Shu‘ab al-Īmān*, 5100). I will explain this ḥadīth in more detail later.

It is unfortunate, then, that although most Muslims enter into a marital relationship, there remains much ignorance surrounding the various ethical, practical, religious, social and spiritual issues regarding marriage. Many of the questions that Islamic scholars and counsellors receive are on the topic of marriage, and they reveal a very troubling state of affairs in our communities. Most people know how to get married and enjoy the happy times of marriage, but many do not know how to stay married when serious conflict arises, and there exists little guidance for young people today to navigate those difficult times. Even in petty situations, many men hasten to utter divorce without considering the possible permanent effects of doing so, and sadly, by the time an issue is brought up with the *shaykh* or *muftī*, a couple may simply be faced with a no-return answer: “You are irrevocably divorced.” If only they had known, studied and learnt at least the basics, they could have avoided much difficulty and heartache. This applies not only to the very serious issue of divorce, but all the various facets of marriage and family life. Even for couples who remain married, if they do not work to resolve their problems, their marriages can over time fall into irreversible disrepair.

While we as Muslims are guided by our religious precepts in all aspects of our lives, it is in the issue of marriage, perhaps uniquely, that cultural practices come into play and get intermingled with religious precepts. We have to be able to get through this cloud, to differentiate between what is cultural and what is not. Parents, particularly among the first generation who have travelled to Western countries and maintain various cultural identities, are often naturally possessive of the marriages of their daughters and sons, and may cloak various

cultural issues in an Islamic garb. This then poses a problem, as for most people one's parents are considered their first, and sometimes only, source of Islam. After all, as the saying goes, the mother's lap is the first *madrasa*. Add to this the influence of Western culture, in which traditional gender roles in marriage have been broken down. Many a time we may not realise that some of these gender roles were actually Islamic and not just purely cultural. Marriage thus becomes a complicated subject with various issues at play.

On the other hand, some young adults have grown up in homes devoid of healthy family interaction and nurture. When it comes to marital relationships in particular, a large part of their conception of marriage is garnered from the movies and soaps they watch or the celebrities and stars they follow. Since there is nothing better at home to go by, marriage for them ends up being a cheating, flirty and dysfunctional relationship that more often than not ends in deception, heartache, lies and misery as depicted on screen or on social media. Soaps and movies with healthy marriages would be boring, no?

Therefore, learning about not only the religious laws and technicalities of marriage and divorce, but importantly the prophetic model for a healthy marital relationship, is an extremely important matter. Whether one is unmarried, newly married, long married, or divorced or widowed, it is essential that one study the prophetic paradigm and strive to apply and convey it to others in their family and circles of influence. There are many misconceptions in our communities and it is only through a collective effort of returning to the guiding teachings of our Messenger ﷺ that we may move forward in rectifying the current state of affairs.

This book cannot cover all aspects of every culture. There are many permissible and impermissible cultural practices taking place related to marriage. We cannot deal with them all here. Here I cover what I have observed in the various communities from the several countries across various continents in which I have lived—the UK, US, India, Syria and South Africa—and during my experience as an *imām* and *muftī*, through the hundreds of couples and individuals with whom I have had discussions and consultations on marital issues.

The chapters will touch on issues ranging from finding a partner and wedding ceremonies to dealing with marital problems and sensitive issues that should not be shied away from, including dealing with in-laws, domestic violence and matters of sexual intimacy. All of these will be addressed from the viewpoint of the Qur'ān and Sunna as I have found it interpreted by people of learning from my time and from authorities past. Although I will speak prescriptively, this book is not intended to be the final word on the subject, nor to serve as a kind of updated marriage chapter from a *fiqh* manual. As human beings with complex lives and situations, each reader will come with a different set of desires, problems and questions for which he or she seeks answers. The topic of marriage is vast and this book cannot touch upon every issue.

In my work advising and counselling couples, I generally tell the husband, when I am speaking to him alone, that he must make 70% of the sacrifice, and I do the same when speaking to the wife. This is to get them both to make the best effort on their part and hopefully meet each other half way. I adopt a similar approach in this book. When reading a section dedicated to you, if you feel as a woman or man that I am telling you to make the greater effort and sacrifice, my suggestions should not be interpreted as demanding more of either men or women. Both share immensely in the responsibility of making a marriage work.

The idea for this book was born from the immense interest that programs and talks on marriage related topics generate. They tend to be some of the most well-attended programs in the Muslim community. Repeatedly have I heard the need being expressed for another book on marriage. Several times I have been invited to deliver talks and even whole-day seminars on the subject. I am sure there are many excellent books on the Islamic marriage, but I intentionally avoided reading any while writing this one. This is because I wanted this book to be purely based on my experiences, interactions and learning and did not want it to be a repeat of what others had said. However, the subject of marriage is a generic and organic one and our religion is one. Hence, there will no doubt be



Chapter 9



DEALING WITH MARITAL PROBLEMS

In life you will inevitably have to deal with problems. There is no perfection to be found in the world, and part of the test for us as human beings is how we decide to deal with the problems we face. Many issues in our community in general are the result of troubled homes, which in turn lead to troubled communities and societies. The home should be a *maskan*, a place in which all family members find *sukūn* (tranquillity). Children who are brought up in troubled homes end up carrying these troubles with them throughout their adult lives, perpetuating these issues in their own families when they become parents, and going on for many generations, which gives rise to the problems and numerous social ills that we see in our society.

Much of the tranquillity of the home and the stability of the family rests on the relationship between the husband and wife. Problems that arise in this relationship can be between the spouses themselves or due to some external issue. If a couple have a strong relationship, external threats to the marriage and to the family can more easily be overcome. Problems within the marriage can have more lasting negative impacts. Regarding these internal problems, couples will have to find solutions and seek advice for their specific situation and unique challenges. Human lives are complex, and each couple will have their own story and struggles. However, from my experience there are certain recurring problems that are worth exploring in

more detail here, with a view to providing some general guidance to couples facing specific issues. These can be summarised into six areas:

- Communication
- Money matters
- Intimacy
- Infidelity
- Domestic violence
- Anger (discussed at length in the next chapter on divorce).

COMMUNICATION PROBLEMS

It is not an exaggeration to say that most of the problems that arise between spouses when it comes to disagreements, can be overcome if they were to work on their communication skills. A man and woman should have married on the basis of a certain level of compatibility, such that any differences and disagreements that arise should be surmountable with effective communication and compromise.

By and large, most arguments occur as a result of miscommunication and frustrations arising over seemingly little things. In some consultations a couple seem to be in a terrible state in their relationship. I am then amazed to find that as I begin delving into the issues, each spouse starts pouring out a barrage of small and seemingly insignificant things. How could it be that a couple is having such major problems over these trivial matters? What I find then is that often these smaller issues mask some bigger underlying problem. The larger problems magnify these small issues and cause them to become more significant. Satan will also do his best to get into the middle of such situations to stir, prod and poke and exaggerate the problems a person notices in their spouse. Rather than constantly putting out small fires, the couple need to sit down and tackle their source, that is, to deal with their underlying issues. This requires sensible reflection and open communication.

Underlying problems may sometimes lie dormant for a number of years, and suddenly one may find their spouse, after many years

