

ALI 508: Marital Relationship in a Materialistic Society

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- Introduction:
 - We have been created by Allah SWT for the next world
 - ✦ But to get there, we have to cross this world and therefore we have to deal with the challenges of this world
 - Part of the challenges we have to overcome is the strong pull that the world has over us
 - How do we overcome this pull towards materialism?
 - ✦ By following the guidance, orders and recommendations of Allah SWT
 - Cut out false expectations; Be satisfied; Be grateful
 - To get married
 - Why? Let us look at the philosophies of marriage

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- Philosophies of Marriage:
 - One: Love and Companionship - All human beings need to feel loved
 - ✦ The love and companionship found within a marriage cannot be duplicated by any other relationship
 - This love and companionship if nurtured and handled properly will make our lives complete – thus not needing other materialistic things to make our lives complete
 - Two: Fulfilling desires legally
 - ✦ This will again allow us to be satisfied with our spouses and not look towards others to satisfy us...

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- Philosophies of Marriage (cont...)
 - Three: Spiritual benefit
 - ✦ When we have contentment at home; there is no need to worry ourselves with outside temptations – thus giving us more time to grow ourselves
 - Four: Maturing of personality
 - ✦ What helps us overcome the temptations of this world is when we are mature and not childlike – marriage helps us reach that maturity

And so what we see from these points is that one of the reasons why marriage is so highly recommended is that it helps us overcome the challenges of this materialistic world

- But we need to put in the effort to earn these gifts from Allah SWT
 - ✦ So what do we need to do?

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- First: God-consciousness and piety (individually = collectively)
 - ✦ The boundaries of Wajib and Haram have to be observed
 - We don't allow haram things in the house
 - We don't watch haram things
 - We observe the time of prayers and help each other in their observance
 - We keep our promises
 - In all of these; if one party is lazy or not observant it will have a negative effect on the relationship

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- **First: God-consciousness and piety (cont)...**
 - What if my spouse is not living up to their end of the bargain?
 - ✦ Check to see if my conduct and expectations are within normal limits
 - ✦ Show through your own actions what you would like to see in your spouse
 - ✦ Try and reason with them on how this effecting your spirituality and that of the children
 - ✦ Pray to Allah SWT to help guide my spouse
 - ✦ Seek counseling from a mutually trusted third party

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- Second: Love and Affection
 - Love is the most important ingredient of a happy marriage
 - ✦ Important point: Don't expect the same manifestation of love and affection from your spouse; we all demonstrate and show love differently
 - One: Be pleasant in character
 - ✦ Smile often; don't be grumpy; don't be rude
 - Imam Ali (AS) said, 'The cause of love is cheerfulness.' (Ghurar al-Hikam, no.5546)
 - Two: Pay attention to your spouse
 - ✦ Respecting their feelings, opinions and desires
 - ✦ Listening to them attentively
 - ✦ Helping them
 - ✦ Sharing interests and ideas
 - ✦ Sharing successes and failures

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- **Second: Love and Affection (cont)...**
 - Three: Overlooking mistakes and forgiving
 - ✦ No one is perfect; everyone will make mistakes
 - It is important not to over-enforce mistakes and constantly bring them up
 - It is important not to nag and constantly criticize
 - Four: Protecting the faults and shortcomings of each from others
 - Five: Physical Intimacy
 - ✦ There needs to be effort from both parties
 - Look nice for each other
 - Do something romantic for each other
 - Keep in mind: The romantic gestures can be manifested in different ways – learn to read them correctly

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- **Third: Communication (Effective Communication):**
 - The ability to communicate and express one's feelings, thoughts and emotions is one of the greatest gifts of Allah SWT
 - ✦ *The Beneficent God. He taught the Qur'an. He created man. He taught him the mode of expression (55:1-4)*
 - Communication is not only through words, but also through tones, gestures, and body language.
 - In married life, communication is one of most important elements to a successful relationship
 - ✦ **Keep in mind:** Communication does not always have to be serious and negative. It should not be done only when things go wrong, for then the idea of communication sets off negative bells in the mind

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- Why is communication important within a marriage?
 - One: We need to be understood
 - Two: We need to discharge feelings
 - ✦ Expressing our emotions and frustrations can serve as a release of pressure and tension
 - Keep in mind: This will not solve the problem but will likely make us feel better
 - Also keep in mind: Not everything needs to be said
 - Three: We need to affect and influence the other partner
 - ✦ If we don't effectively communicate something which is bothering us; we can never expect the other party to fully understand our feelings

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- How to effectively communicate:
 - One: Communicating with positive reinforcement
 - Two: Communicate feelings and do not pass judgments
 - ✦ It is very easy to blurt out a hasty judgment when angered or hurt. This provokes resentment. It is better to express what one feels and convey that only.
 - Three: Communicate clearly so that no misunderstandings can take place
 - ✦ Prepare your thoughts; write them down and use notes if you have to
 - Four: Find the right time and place
 - Five: Effective Listening
 - ✦ One point we have to keep in mind is that “escalation to an argument” is in the hands of the person listening...

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- **The Art of Listening:**
 - Real listening consists of putting aside one's own thoughts for a moment.
 - ✦ Effective listening is not to focus on one's internal responses to the speaker, but to what the speaker is trying to communicate
 - ✦ We have to listen to understand the position of the other party
 - ✦ Do not wait tensely for your turn, because this will immediately be felt by the partner
 - Guidelines for effective listening:
 - ✦ Do not interrupt
 - ✦ Display signs that you are listening
 - ✦ Listen with your heart – HOW?
 - ✦ Listen without judging
 - ✦ Accept even if you do not agree.

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- What prevents effective communication?
 - One: Refusal to acknowledge a problem
 - ✦ Problem: Most people prefer to avoid conflict; they believe that if they avoid it the problem will go away on its own
 - ✦ Solution: It is always best to acknowledge a problem in its infancy and take steps; rather than dealing with it after it has spun out of control
 - Two: Fear of possible consequences
 - ✦ Problem: Honest communication of one's inner feelings may result in hurt feelings or worse consequences
 - ✦ Solution: Effective communication will lead to positive results
 - I.e. utilizing the effective communication and effective listening skills
 - Furthermore, the more a couple communicates, the more skilled they become at it. Over the years it could become a natural and integral part of their married life

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- What prevents effective communication? (cont.)
 - Three: Anxiety about self-disclosure
 - ✦ Problem: Many people feel vulnerable when they express themselves honestly
 - So we pretend to be someone else which only adds to the problems in marriage
 - ✦ Solution: There has to be trust and faith that each spouse has the best interest of each other in mind
 - And the understanding that each spouse is not flawless
 - Therefore, when I hear my spouse open up about herself; I have to keep in mind that I myself have personal feelings of vulnerability

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- Resolving conflict:
 - One: Understanding the needs and emotions of each partner
 - ✦ Don't judge your partner based on your own standards or emotional responses
 - ✦ The most important step to understanding the needs of the partner is to understand one's own emotions
 - I.e. why do I react differently? What causes me to feel this way?
 - Self-awareness allows an individual to change and appreciate the needs and emotions of others
 - Two: Make known your expectations
 - ✦ Sometimes people assume that others know (or should know) what is expected of them
 - Don't drop hints; express clearly what you desire and want

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- Resolving conflict (cont.):
 - Three: Don't express feelings when angry
 - ✦ Many times offensive things are said when one is angry which are almost always regretted
 - Four: Accept criticism when it is true
 - ✦ Self-preservation and defense is a natural instinct of human beings
 - However to have harmony in marriage both partners should be willing to accept constructive criticism from each other
 - Keep in mind: how we criticize will help in it being accepted
 - Five: Pinpoint the origination of certain frustrations
 - ✦ In most marriages, a predictable sequence of conflicts can be uncovered. Solving those can end a lot of conflicts

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- **Arguing Reasonably:**
 - One: The aim of the argument is not to overpower the other person; rather it is to affect their thinking
 - Two: Don't say things that would offend the other party
 - ✦ When abusive things are said to a person it is natural for him to react accordingly
 - Three: Acknowledge what is right so the other party does not think you are hiding and covering the truth
 - ✦ Acknowledging means that each partner is ready to see the good of the other, and the bad in himself
 - Four: Do not return evil with evil
 - ✦ If one spouse never compliments or appreciates the other spouse; it doesn't mean that similar behaviour should be returned back.
 - Five: Remember the love that exists between the couple during the argument
 - ✦ Always express love for each other even in moments when you don't really like one another.

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- **Dealing with Extended Families:**
 - Maintain close relations
 - Both spouses should equally respect each other's families equally
 - If you are living together with your in-laws, it is important to respect the feelings of the spouse in front of the family members.
 - If you are living together with your in-laws, it is important to address likes and dislikes ahead of time
 - Accept advice discerningly
 - Never complain about the spouse to your parents