



Marriage and Gender Roles in Islam: Beyond Rights and Duties

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Introduction

Over the past two centuries, Muslim societies confronted what often felt like insurmountable trials: from colonial domination and military defeat to political fragmentation and institutional decay. And yet, even as the Western world began to stagger under the recoil of the very ideologies it violently imposed, Muslim societies remained remarkably resilient in one vital domain: the family. Muslim homes buckled down to weather waves of religious and intellectual onslaught. Marriage was not merely a social arrangement but a space for cultivating moral values and sustaining quiet resistance. But the storm has now caught up with us too, straining one of our last outposts of stability. Muslims have found themselves in the crosshairs of a hegemonic culture that often devalues or distorts marriage and family life. Dominant narratives, inspired by individualism, feminism, and capitalism—to name just a few—cast marriage as a lifestyle choice, desirable to some but unnecessary for the moral legitimacy of intimate relationships. Gender is fluid, roles are uncertain, and fulfillment is measured by the extent of one's autonomy rather than the strength of one's family unit. The result? Rising loneliness, collapsing birth rates, and growing alienation between men and women. Many young Muslims are unsure what a healthy marriage looks like—or whether it's worth pursuing at all.

The pressures of modern life have only intensified these challenges, placing added strain on both spouses. Ironically, modern technologies designed to make life easier (think laundry machines, stoves, microwaves) have often led to higher expectations. The rise of online influencers has further fueled this trend, curating glimpses into seemingly perfect homes and relationships that present often unattainable standards, distorting reality and fostering dissatisfaction with the ordinary. Meals that were once simple have become elaborate, often requiring scrupulous dedication and extensive nutritional planning to execute. Where owning a few items of clothing was once the norm, full and varied wardrobes are now expected. It was once sufficient to sweep your home and call it a day. Now, cleanliness involves complicated rituals of vacuuming, mopping, and sanitizing. Parenting too is more demanding than ever. Children are now financially dependent for decades due to extended schooling and rising educational costs. Today, parents are not merely expected to feed and protect their children but to

manage their lives in micro-detail, juggling school schedules, extracurriculars, and personal development. At the same time, modern economies demand longer work hours and often require both spouses to work, all while the communal support once provided by extended family—the proverbial village—has become increasingly rare. Without grandparents, aunts, uncles, and neighbors readily available to share in childcare and household responsibilities, couples are left to shoulder these burdens largely on their own. Needless to say, our conditions have changed significantly from those of previous generations, and not necessarily for the better.

Like much of the world, the Muslim community has been grappling with how modernity has fundamentally reshaped family life. This reshaping has led to deep structural changes that cannot simply be reversed, and these changes necessarily shift how we think and talk about our roles and expectations. What follows is not a prescriptive guide, but an invitation to reflect more carefully on the questions we bring to marriage. While Islamic law provides a clear and perfect foundation, it was never intended to prescribe every detail of married life or other non-ritual social interactions. Healthy marriages have been sustained and guided by Islamic virtues, such as kindness, trust, forbearance, and mercy. Culture, social context, and lived experience have also always shaped how those legal principles are interpreted and applied. Scholars, after all, coined the maxim: “Custom carries legal weight.”

The added problem, however, is that in the West, it is unclear what counts as “custom” because we often lack a shared cultural framework to shape and negotiate our expectations for marriage. In premodern, more homogeneous cultures, marital expectations were largely dictated by shared customs, making it easier for couples to align with an established status quo and have similar expectations. In contrast, modern societies are heterogeneous, with no single cultural framework that both spouses automatically acknowledge or adhere to. This diversity means that couples must actively negotiate their roles, often drawing from different, and at times conflicting, influences. Those living in the West (or influenced by Western ideals) encounter a wide array of ways that marriages can be structured. Your Pakistani immigrant neighbors might be surprised that your parents or in-laws live separately. Childhood friends from Virginia might pity you as a wife if you do not have a career. And your Arab grandparents might raise an

eyebrow if they see you, as a husband, changing diapers. Beyond these local contrasts, the globalized digital world exposes people to countless models of marriage and pushes them to compare and idealize arrangements that may not align with their local realities. Add to this the volatile online debates about gender norms, and it's easy to feel utterly confused.

In the absence of a shared framework for navigating modern marital challenges, Muslims have been seeking clarity through a range of strategies. Some turn to the Islamic legal tradition to define not only the rights and duties of spouses, but also guidelines for behavior and character. Others treat inherited cultural norms as inherently Islamic and therefore obligatory. Still others borrow selectively from contemporary discourse, reframing liberal or conservative concepts in Islamic language. Think about how some recast “toxic” masculinity as “*jahili*” masculinity, emphasizing the Prophet’s emotional sensitivity and domestic involvement, often to the exclusion of other traits. Or how others invoke *fitra*, our innate nature, to insist that gendered roles are divinely fixed and non-negotiable.¹ Many of these efforts are rooted in sincere attempts to revive prophetic models, but they inadvertently impose narrow boundaries on what a marriage can look like. The beauty of the Islamic tradition lies in its clarity on what is permissible and what is not, while leaving ample room for relationships to be shaped by individual temperaments, social realities, and cultural contexts. To meaningfully engage the Islamic dimensions of marriage today, we must consider not only the legal tradition, but also the powerful influence of culture and how profoundly modern life has reshaped the very paradigm of marriage. Only then can we recalibrate our expectations and build relationships that are both faithful to our tradition and responsive to our realities.

To chart this path forward, I begin with a brief reflection on marriage in the Qur’an and Sunnah. I then turn to the two rights and responsibilities that scholars unanimously upheld in marriage. From there, I explore why healthy marriages must balance law and ethics. Drawing from the Prophetic example and beyond, I conclude with a glimpse into the many ways Muslims have practiced marriage,

¹ See, for example, Feyda Sayan-Cengiz, “‘Make Masculinity Great Again’: Politics of Marriage and Neoconservatism in Turkey’s Islamic-Oriented Self-Help Discourse,” *Turkish Studies* 25, no. 2 (2022): 280–300, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14683849.2023.2171869>.

reminding us that faithful relationships can take many forms and inviting us to adapt our own.

Marriage in the Qur'an and Sunnah: An ethical framework

Marriage in Islam evokes what so many long for: a companion to share the ups and downs of life, love and tranquility, and the opportunity to grow a family.² There is nothing like marriage, the Prophet ﷺ noted, for two who love one another.³ Anyone who can marry should, because it fulfills one's desires and guards their chastity.⁴ Sexual intercourse does not just become lawful, but praiseworthy and a form of worship: "Fulfilling your desires with your spouse counts as an act of charity."⁵ Even in the most private of acts, Islam infuses meaning and reward. The best of you, the Prophet declared, are those who are best to their families.⁶ Treat your women well, he commanded in other instances, and when approaching them for intimacy, do so lovingly.⁷ The mundane aspects of married life are not overlooked either. The Prophet taught, "A dinar you spend in the cause of Allah, a dinar you spend freeing a slave, a dinar you give in charity, and a dinar you spend on your family—the greatest of them in reward is the one you spend on your family."⁸ In intimacy, as in all aspects of life, excellence (*ihsan*) is the standard.

At the heart of Islamic marital ethics is a directive that resounds throughout the Qur'an and Sunnah: to treat one another *bil-ma'ruf*. While often translated as "with kindness," *ma'ruf* more precisely refers to what is commonly recognized as good within a given society.⁹ This ethic goes beyond the bare fulfillment of obligations. It calls for behavior that reflects socially and culturally intelligible standards of respect and care. It reveals Islam's profound sensitivity to context—that successful marriages are not built solely on legal rights and duties, but also on shared norms

² Qur'an 7:189, 16:72, 30:21.

³ *Sunan Ibn Māja*, no. 1847.

⁴ Qur'an 24:32.

⁵ *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, no. 1006.

⁶ *Jāmi' al-Tirmidhī*, no. 3895.

⁷ *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, nos. 1468a, 6042.

⁸ *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, no. 995.

⁹ 'Abd al-Raḥmān al-Sa'dī, *al-Qawā'id al-ḥassān li tafsīr al-Qur'ān* (Maktabat al-Rushd, 1999), 63.

and cultural wisdom. Marriage is, in God’s own words, a sign that calls us to His remembrance and a locus of serenity and solace.¹⁰

Believers are instructed not only to live with their spouses *bil-maʿruf* but also, if necessary, to part from them in the same spirit.¹¹ Even in hardship, Islam calls believers to rise to a higher ethic: “If you dislike them, perhaps you dislike something in which God has placed much good.”¹² The Prophet ﷺ echoed this sentiment: “A believing man should not resent a believing woman. If he dislikes one trait in her, he will be pleased with another.”¹³ When the demands of marriage were overwhelming, the Prophet’s counsel to his own daughter—to make *dhikr* a nightly habit—remains as relevant as ever, grounding the relationship in spiritual renewal.¹⁴ Taken together, these verses and hadith capture a vision of marriage rich with emotional nuance and spiritual depth. They serve as a reminder that while marriage is a legal contract, it is foremost a sacred trust (*mithaq ghaliz*) entered into in the name of God, invoking divine oversight and accountability.¹⁵ It is not simply a private arrangement, but a public bond with communal significance. Its terms can be deeply symbolic: *mahr* may reflect substantial wealth or, in exceptional cases, something as modest and meaningful as teaching verses of the Qur’an. These layers of meaning remind us that marriage in Islam is rooted in mercy, mutual care, and the pursuit of divine pleasure.

Marriage in the legal tradition: A minimal contractual framework

In contrast to the rich moral texture of the scriptural tradition, Islamic laws on marriage can often feel like a compass rather than a blueprint. Tasked with defining what was legally actionable—what could or could not be enforced in a court of law—juristic focus was on establishing rights, duties, and limits, not prescribing the emotional or spiritual core of a successful marriage. Recognizing this gap, scholars often composed ethical treatises alongside legal manuals, reflecting on what a marriage rooted in *ihsan* should look like. These writings, shaped by the

¹⁰ Qur’an 30:21.

¹¹ Qur’an 2:231.

¹² Qur’an 4:19.

¹³ *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, no 1469.

¹⁴ *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, no. 5362.

¹⁵ Qur’an 4:21.

customs and social values of their time, offered a more expansive vision of marital life, one concerned with what spouses should strive for, not just what they must fulfill. In light of this, the legal tradition remains essential as the foundation of minimum standards and rights from which we can begin to build marriages that are responsive to our contemporary realities.

The concept of *qiwama*, often translated as male guardianship or headship, has shaped the framework of Muslim marriages. Rooted in Qur’anic language—“Men are *qawwamun* over women”—*qiwama* conveys responsibility, protection, and authority.¹⁶ Scholars interpreted this verse to mean that men are entrusted with the financial, physical, and moral responsibility of maintaining their families.¹⁷ A man’s responsibility for financially supporting his family is rooted in a number of sources. The Qur’an, in multiple instances, states that the father must provide for his family according to what is customarily fair (*al-ma’ruf*).¹⁸ The Prophet ﷺ also emphasized a husband’s duty to provide for his wife, saying: “Feed them from what you eat, clothe them with [the quality of] what you wear, do not strike them, and do not revile them.”¹⁹ In a well-documented incident, Hind bint ‘Utba complained to the Prophet about her husband Abu Sufyan’s lack of financial support. The Prophet permitted her to take from his wealth what was necessary for herself and her children in a reasonable manner (*al-ma’ruf*).²⁰

A husband has two primary financial obligations to his wife that were legally upheld. The first is *mahr*, the dower due to the wife at the time of marriage.²¹ The second is *nafaqa*, the ongoing financial support that a husband must provide his wife and, eventually, their children. As for the *mahr*, most jurists agreed there was no upper limit. Imams Ahmad and al-Shafi‘i also rejected the need for a fixed minimum, so long as the gift had value. Imams Malik and Abu Hanifa, by contrast, set minimum thresholds (ranging from three to forty dirhams), drawing on social

¹⁶ Qur’an 4:34.

¹⁷ See, for example, Ibn Jarīr al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi‘ al-bayān*, ed. Maḥmūd Shākir, 24 vols. (Dār al-Tarbiya wa-l-Turāth, n.d.), 8:290ff, <https://shamela.ws/book/43/4374#p1>; al-Qurṭubī, *al-Jāmi‘ li aḥkām al-Qur’ān*, eds. Aḥmad al-Bardūnī and Ibrāhīm Aṭfayyish, 20 vols. (Dār al-Kutub al-Miṣriyya, 1964), 5:168, <https://shamela.ws/book/20855/1838>; Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr al-Qur’ān al-‘azīm*, ed. Ḥikmat bin Bashīr, 7 vols. (Dār Ibn al-Jawzī, 2010), 3:94, <https://shamela.ws/book/1503/1300>.

¹⁸ Qur’an 2:228, 2:233, 65:7.

¹⁹ *Sunan Abī Dāwūd*, no. 2137; *Sunan al-Nasā’ī*, no. 2057.

²⁰ *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, no. 7161.

²¹ Qur’an 4:4, 4:25; Muḥammad bin Rushd al-Ḥafīd, *Bidāyat al-mujtahid*, ed. Muḥammad Ṣubḥī Ḥasan Ḥallāq, 4 vols. (Maktabat Ibn Taymiyya, 1995), 3:37.

norms around marriage during their time.²² Most jurists allowed delayed *mahr* with the wife's consent, but all agreed it became obligatory if the husband intended to consummate the marriage.²³

In parallel, scholars unanimously agreed that a husband is obligated to financially support his wife throughout their marriage and her waiting period (*'idda*) if the marriage ended.²⁴ However, a wife deemed *nashiz*—typically referring to one who leaves the home without her husband's permission (e.g., moves back in with her parents) or persistently refuses intimacy without valid reason—was often held by jurists to forfeit her right to maintenance.²⁵ The obligation to provide remained in cases where a wife was ill or otherwise unable to engage in intimacy, since the legal condition in these scenarios was her availability (*tamkin*), not intercourse itself.²⁶

As for what *nafaqa* includes, scholars generally agreed that it encompasses housing, food, and clothing, and related essentials. Its quantity and quality was determined by custom and the socioeconomic status of both spouses.²⁷ While the Shafi'i set specific benchmarks, the Hanafis, Malikis, and Hanbalis insisted that maintenance must reflect prevailing social norms.²⁸ This approach was grounded in repeated Qur'anic injunctions to provide *bil-ma'ruf*. Debates extended to whether *nafaqa* must be provided as tangible goods or cash, its frequency (daily vs. as needed), and whether it must cover healthcare or travel expenses like hajj.²⁹ In every case, custom was central to determining the appropriate standard.

Given its importance, jurists took neglect of *nafaqa* seriously. The Malikis, Shafi'i, and Hanbalis allowed a wife to seek judicial divorce for persistent failure to provide.³⁰ The Hanafis, preferring reconciliation, permitted her to take out a loan

²² Ibn Rushd, *Bidāyat al-mujtahid*, 3:38.

²³ Ibn Rushd, *Bidāyat al-mujtahid*, 3:44.

²⁴ Ibn Rushd, *Bidāyat al-mujtahid*, 3:103–4.

²⁵ Ibn Rushd, *Bidāyat al-mujtahid*, 3:105; Yahya bin Sharaf al-Nawawī, *Rawḍat al-ṭālibīn wa 'umdat al-muftīn*, ed. Zuhayr al-Shāwīs, 12 vols. (al-Maktab al-Islāmī, 1991), 9:59–60.

²⁶ Ibn Rushd, *Bidāyat al-mujtahid*, 3:105; al-Kāsānī, *Badā'i' al-ṣanā'i' fī tartīb al-sharā'ī'*, 5:134–36.

²⁷ Ibn Rushd, *Bidāyat al-mujtahid*, 3:104; al-Kāsānī, *Badā'i' al-ṣanā'i' fī tartīb al-sharā'ī'*, 5:153; see also Ibn Baṭṭāl's commentary in Ibn Hajar al-'Asqalānī, *Fatḥ al-bārī bi sharḥ al-Bukhārī*, ed. Muḥammad Fu'ād 'Abd al-Bāqī and Muḥibb al-Dīn al-Khaṭīb, 13 vols. (al-Maktaba al-Salafiyya, 1970), 9:513.

²⁸ Al-Kāsānī, *Badā'i' al-ṣanā'i' fī tartīb al-sharā'ī'*, 5:145ff.

²⁹ Al-Kāsānī, *Badā'i' al-ṣanā'i' fī tartīb al-sharā'ī'*, 5:154ff.

³⁰ Ibn Rushd, *Bidāyat al-mujtahid*, 3:98.

in her husband's name to meet her needs.³¹ This was also the expectation if he traveled or went missing. Yet scholars were cautious not to define neglect based on temporary hardship, drawing on the verse: "If it is difficult for someone to repay a debt, postpone it until a time of ease."³² If the neglect was habitual, however, legal action was justified.

A husband's guardianship, in turn, was understood to carry a measure of authority in the home, often described as his "right to obedience." Several hadiths counsel wives to obey their husbands. The Prophet stated, "If a woman prays her five (daily prayers), fasts her month (Ramadan), guards her chastity, and obeys her husband, she will enter Paradise from whichever gate she wishes."³³ When asked which women are the best, he replied: "The one who pleases him when he looks at her, obeys him when he commands, and does not act contrary to his wishes regarding herself or his wealth."³⁴ In other narrations, the Prophet ﷺ discouraged a wife from performing non-obligatory fasts without her husband's permission.³⁵

So what exactly does obedience entail? Scholars diverged. Some argued that she is obligated to obey in all areas of life, so long as they are not sinful. Others restricted obedience to matters that were culturally expected in marriage. The Hanafī jurist Ibn Nujaym, for instance, in debating whether a husband can compel his wife to engage in jihad, asserted that a woman need only comply with her husband's requests in matters related to marriage.³⁶ While the nature and extent of the obedience may have been debated, all scholars agreed that a wife's main legal obligation was to be sexually available for her husband.³⁷ This is sourced back to a number of hadith, such as: "If a man calls his wife to his bed and she refuses, and

³¹ Al-Kāsānī, *Badā' i ' al-ṣanā' i ' fī tartīb al-sharā' i*, 5:160; al-Ṣadr al-Shahīd, *Sharḥ Adab al-qāḍī li-l-Khaṣṣāf*, ed. Muḥiyy al-Dīn al-Sarḥān, 4 vols. (Maṭba'at al-Irshād, 1978), 4:249; Ibn al-Humām, *Sharḥ Faṭḥ al-qadīr 'alā al-Hidāya sharḥ Bidāya al-mubtadī*, 11 vols. (Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyya, 1970), 4:390.

³² Qur'an 2:280.

³³ *Ṣaḥīḥ Ibn Ḥibbān: kitāb al-awāmir; bāb dhikr ijāb al-janna li-l-mar'a idhā aṭā 'at zawjahā.*

³⁴ *Sunan al-Nasā' i*, no. 3231.

³⁵ *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, no. 5195.

³⁶ Ibn Nujaym, *al-Baḥr al-rā' iq sharḥ Kanz al-daqa' iq*, 8 vols. (Dār al-Kitāb al-Islāmī, n.d.), 5:77.

³⁷ Al-Nawawī, for example, states that there are only two things a wife is obligated to do: make herself sexually available to her husband and [consequently] remain in his home (*tamkīnuhā zawjahā min nafsihā wa mulāzamat baytiḥ*). Ibn Qudāma and al-Shīrāzī both state, "The object of the marriage contract is sexual intimacy—nothing else is required of her." See Yahyā bin Sharaf al-Nawawī, *Sharḥ al-Nawawī 'alā Muslim*, 18 vols. (Dār Ihyā' al-Turāth al-'Arabī, 1972), 14:165; Muwaffaq al-Dīn ibn Qudāma, *al-Mughnī*, ed. 'Abd Allāh bin 'Abd al-Muḥsin al-Turkī and 'Abd al-Fattāḥ al-Ḥulū, 15 vols. (Dār 'Ālam al-Kutub, 1997), 10:225–26; Abū Ishāq al-Shīrāzī, *al-Muḥadhdhab fī fīqh al-imām al-Shāfi' i*, 3 vols. (Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyya, n.d.), 2:482; al-Kāsānī, *Badā' i ' al-ṣanā' i ' fī tartīb al-sharā' i*, 3:613.

he spends the night angry with her, the angels curse her until morning.”³⁸ In another, the Prophet ﷺ further emphasized this right, stating: “When a man calls his wife to intimacy, she should come to him, even if she is at the oven.”³⁹ It was for this reason that a wife was not to fast voluntarily or leave the home without her husband’s permission, as these acts might hinder his access to intimacy.⁴⁰

The Islamic legal tradition introduced critical limitations to the obligation of sexual availability. A wife is exempt from intercourse during menstruation and obligatory fasting, and is not obligated if she is ill or fears harm for herself.⁴¹ These exceptions underscore that, while sexual availability was acknowledged as a central marital obligation, it was neither unconditional nor meant to compromise a woman’s well-being. At the same time, while the hadiths that emphasize a wife’s sexual responsiveness do not endorse physical coercion, they stress a broader marital ethic—one that warns against weaponizing intimacy.⁴² Ibn Hajar, the preeminent hadith scholar, explained that the hadith regarding the angels cursing refers to a wife who withholds intimacy without any valid reason.⁴³ Just as a husband’s neglect in providing for his wife can sow resentment, a wife’s withholding of intimacy out of spite can fracture the relationship.⁴⁴ Both undermine the spirit of mutual care and reciprocity that lies at the heart of a healthy marriage. As the Andalusian hadith commentator al-Muhallab bin Abi Sufra (d. 435 AH) observed, deliberately neglecting obligations towards your spouse, whether physical or financial, risks incurring divine displeasure.⁴⁵

³⁸ *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, no. 3237; *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, no. 1436.

³⁹ *Jāmi‘ al-Tirmidhī*, no. 1160.

⁴⁰ Al-Nawawī, *Sharḥ al-Nawawī ‘alā Muslim*, 7:115; Jalāl al-Dīn al-Maḥallī, *Kanz al-rāghibīn sharḥ Minhāj al-talibīn*, ed. Maḥmūd Ṣāliḥ al-Ḥadīdī, 2 vols. (Dār al-Minhāj, 2013), 2:430. Al-Maḥallī, a Shafī‘ī scholar, explains that a wife leaving the home without her husband’s permission is considered *nāshiz* because a husband has a right to keep her on retainer (*ḥabs*) in exchange for his financial maintenance. Similarly, the Hanbali jurist al-Buhūtī clarifies that it is prohibited for a wife to leave the house without her husband’s permission because his right upon her [to sexual intimacy] is obligatory. If she does leave, she forfeits her right to *nafaqa* because she is no longer making herself available for sexual intimacy (*li ‘adam al-tamkīn min al-istimtā’*). See Maṣṣūr bin Yūnus al-Buhūtī, *Kashshāf al-qinā’ ‘an matn al-Iqnā’*, ed. Ibrāhīm Aḥmad ‘Abd al-Ḥamīd (Dār ‘Ālam al-Kutub, 2003), 2554.

⁴¹ Ibn Qudāma, *al-Mughnī*, 10:170; al-Buhūtī, *Kashshāf al-qinā’*, 2543.

⁴² For more on harm in marriage, see Tesneem Alkiek, “Marital Harm Through the Ages: Perspectives from Islamic Scholarship and Practice,” *Hashiya* (forthcoming).

⁴³ Ibn Hajar, *Fath al-Bārī*, 9:294.

⁴⁴ The same is also true of their inverses—a wife’s refusal to contribute to the household income when she is employed and the family is struggling financially will sow resentment, and a husband’s neglect or withholding of intimacy out of spite or selfishness will likely fracture the relationship. These scenarios are discussed in further detail in the following sections.

⁴⁵ Ibn Baṭṭāl in Ibn Hajar, *Fath al-Bārī*, 9:294.

Blending law and ethics: A holistic framework

Any meaningful discussion of Islamic marriage must begin with a clear recognition that legal rulings do not always capture the full moral vision of the tradition: what is legally permissible is not always morally virtuous and what is morally repugnant is not always legally forbidden. As such, both legal and ethical principles are necessary components of a healthy marital framework. The former provides a foundation for the minimum standards and rights we are obligated to uphold (setting exceptional circumstances aside) and the latter ensures these rights (and the marriage as a whole) are enshrined in Allah’s vision of marriage as a space for mercy, compassion, comfort, companionship, tranquility, and reward. While Islamic law outlines the structural foundations of marriage—its rights, duties, and enforceable terms—it is Islamic ethics that breathe life into those legal frameworks. The Qur’an and Sunnah consistently call believers to fulfill their obligations with excellence (*ihsan*). In the domain of marriage, this synergy between law and ethics forms a holistic vision—one where the legal minimum is never the moral ceiling.

Take, for instance, the obligation of *nafaqa*. Legally, this is defined as providing food, clothing, and shelter according to prevailing social norms. But the Prophet ﷺ expanded this technical requirement into a spiritual act, saying the greatest dinar spent in the cause of Allah is the one you spend on your family.⁴⁶ This ethical framing is especially important when considering how classical rulings translate into contemporary realities. For example, many premodern jurists did not include a wife’s medical expenses within the husband’s financial obligations, limiting *nafaqa* to essentials such as food, clothing, and shelter. This reasoning was tied to a time when medical care was rare, inexpensive, and often non-institutional. Moreover, women typically belonged to robust extended family networks, where fathers, brothers, and uncles played an active role in a woman’s financial well-being and protection, providing additional layers of support when needed. Today, however, family structures and economic systems have changed dramatically. In many cases, a wife may have little to no independent income, lack access to healthcare benefits, and no longer have extended family to turn to for help. In such situations, the ethical responsibility of a husband extends well beyond the classical legal

⁴⁶ *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, no. 995.

minimum. Providing for a spouse's medical care is no longer an act of generosity—it is a moral necessity, deeply aligned with the Qur'anic ethos of treating your spouse according to *ma'ruf*.

By the same token, Islamic ethics also encourages spouses to consider the moral weight of their financial expectations. Just as it would be inadequate today for a husband to limit his provision to the bare minimum of food and clothing, it may be equally unrealistic—especially in debt-heavy, consumer-driven economies—to expect him to shoulder the full financial burden of an inflated standard of living alone. In many parts of the world, dual-income households have become a practical necessity. In such arrangements, if both spouses are employed and facing financial hardship, it is praiseworthy for a wife to be mindful of the family's broader financial reality and contribute where she is able. When both partners engage one another with this level of attentiveness, marriage becomes more than a contract. It becomes a sacred partnership, grounded in the ethical ideals Islam envisions for a flourishing family life.

Building on this framing, where Islamic law assigns the husband financial responsibility for his household, Islamic ethics charges him with its moral leadership and well-being. His authority is not arbitrary or aggressive, but purposeful—a form of stewardship accountable to Allah and exercised through justice, care, and foresight. A husband who thoughtfully consults his wife embodies Prophetic character and the Qur'anic ideal of *shura*, fostering unity and respect. In turn, a wife who follows her husband's lead with grace and trust, while openly communicating her perspectives, contributes to a home built on harmony and emotional intelligence. Together, they exemplify a partnership rooted in compassion, understanding, and purpose—hallmarks of a marriage inspired by Islamic ethics.

This same space of trust is where spouses meet one another's sexual needs. The Prophet ﷺ emphasized gentleness in all matters,⁴⁷ and urged husbands to be mindful of their wives' emotional state before intimacy.⁴⁸ On the basis of such

⁴⁷ *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, no. 2594.

⁴⁸ *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, no. 5204. Ibn Hajar, commenting on this hadith, notes that a reasonable person would not beat his wife and then attempt to engage his wife intimately later that day. "Intercourse or cohabitation is only desirable when there is emotional inclination and a desire for closeness, whereas the one who has been beaten usually feels aversion toward the one who beat them. Thus, this [hadith] serves as an implicit condemnation of such behavior." See Ibn Hajar, *Fatḥ al-Bārī*, 9:303.

reports, scholars devoted sections on the etiquettes of marital intimacy (*adab al-jima'*) within their broader works of proper conduct.⁴⁹ In practice, this may mean recognizing emotional or mental health challenges that affect intimacy, and responding not with blame or entitlement, but with care. A husband who approaches his wife's postpartum struggles with patience and empathy honors the deeper moral calling to be a source of stability and comfort in her times of vulnerability. Likewise, a wife who pleases her husband intimately even when she herself may not feel inclined exemplifies noble traits of selflessness and devotion.

As the Prophet ﷺ said, "The best of you are those who are best to their families, and I am the best among you to my family."⁵⁰ This hadith sets a benchmark for behavior rooted in love, attentiveness, and generosity. Whether through active participation in parenting, offering emotional presence, or simply lightening one another's daily burdens, spouses honor the spiritual dignity of their relationship when they strive to be the best to their families. In such cases, *ihsan* and *ma'ruf* guide spouses to recognize the unspoken but vital elements that sustain a healthy relationship. Together, these examples show that Islamic law provides the minimum standard, but it is only when combined with Islamic ethics that flourishing relationships can be cultivated. When either operates in isolation, marriages will be deficient and dysfunctional. The legal system defines what one *must* do, while the ethical system invites believers toward what they *ought* to do in pursuit of Allah's pleasure. When ethics and law are integrated, marriage becomes a space for grace, growth, and divine reward.

The task for Muslim couples today is not to blindly replicate medieval or modern models of marriage, but to uphold the spirit of Qur'anic and Prophetic guidance while adapting to new realities. Our world demands a marital partnership that acknowledges shifting economic conditions, recognizes the importance of shared parenting, and values emotional intelligence as much as financial provision. The legal rulings of the past were never meant to be rigid molds into which all marriages must fit, but rather foundations upon which to build functional and

⁴⁹ For example, Ibn al-Qayyim says, "Among the things that should precede intercourse is caressing the woman, kissing her, and sucking her tongue. The Messenger of Allah ﷺ used to play with his wives and kiss them." See Ibn al-Qayyim, *Zād al-ma'ad fī hadī khayr al-'ibād*, 7 vols. (Dār 'Aṭā' at al-'Ilm, 2019), 4:363, <https://shamela.ws/book/197>. For more, see Habeeb Akande, *A Taste of Honey: Sexuality and Erotology in Islam* (Rabaah Publishers, 2015).

⁵⁰ *Jāmi' al-Tirmidhī*, no. 3895.

fulfilling relationships. We live in a world that is changing at an unprecedented pace, where the needs of men and women are evolving, and where the demands of family life are more complex than ever before. The key is to engage in thoughtful, principled discussions about what marriage should look like today: rooted in Islamic values and responsive to contemporary realities. To that end, this final section offers examples of how Muslim marriages embodied varied practices and dynamics, illustrating the flexibility and resilience we, too, can embrace today.

Lived realities

Across generations, beginning with the Prophet ﷺ, Muslim marriages took a wide range of forms. Below, I explore a few dimensions of that reality: the home, work, interpersonal dynamics, intimacy, and the *mahr* (dower)—all of which defy simplistic generalizations. Lived experience often reshaped even the most established expectations, bending them to the contours of custom and circumstance.

Home

In many societies, women bore the primary responsibility for household tasks such as cooking, cleaning, and childcare. Numerous reports reflect this pattern during the time of the Prophet: companions often returned home inquiring whether their wives had prepared food for the Prophet ﷺ or his guests,⁵¹ and on multiple occasions, the Prophet ﷺ himself returned with visitors and asked his wives to serve them.⁵² When Jabir bin ‘Abdullah told the Prophet ﷺ that he had married an older, more experienced woman to help care for his younger siblings, the Prophet ﷺ affirmed the wisdom of this decision, indicating that such roles were both expected and appreciated within the family structure.⁵³

Among the many examples, two stand out for highlighting how women’s domestic responsibilities were affirmed with the promise of great reward. Fatima (rA), the daughter of the Prophet, was overwhelmed by the toll of grinding grain and

⁵¹ See, for example: *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, nos. 668, 4102, 5182, 5391; *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, nos. 1428, 2054.

⁵² See, for example: *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, no. 2052; *Sunan Abī Dāwūd*, no. 5040.

⁵³ *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, nos. 4052 and 5367. Commenting on this incident, Ibn Baṭṭāl clarified that while a wife is not legally obligated to care for her husband’s children from a previous marriage, doing so reflects good companionship and moral excellence. See Ibn Hajar, *Faṭḥ al-Bārī*, 9:513.

household labor. When she approached her father for help, the Prophet ﷺ offered a practical solution: he recommended she and ‘Ali (rA) divide responsibilities, with ‘Ali taking charge of tasks outside the home and Fatima managing those within.⁵⁴ For many scholars, this incident reflected a prescriptive model of gendered labor; for others, it represented a contextually appropriate arrangement.⁵⁵ In either case, it affirmed the virtue of domestic labor. Similarly, Asma’ bint Yazid voiced her frustration to the Prophet ﷺ. Men, she observed, were able to more easily pursue lofty acts of worship like attending funerals, going on pilgrimage, and engaging in jihad while women often remained at home, consumed by family responsibilities. The Prophet praised her insight and assured her that a woman in her position would receive the same reward for her sacrifices.⁵⁶

Yet the burden of household labor did not fall on women alone. The Prophet ﷺ is famously described as being “in the service of his family,” mending his clothes and performing household tasks.⁵⁷ When asked to describe the Prophet’s home life, ‘A’isha responded matter-of-factly: “He did what men usually do in their homes”—he patched his sandals, mended clothes, sewed, milked the animals, swept the house, and saw to his own needs.⁵⁸ Her description implies not a one-time gesture of help, but regular participation. As al-Muhallab observed, the Prophet’s conduct was not just a sign of humility, but a model of behavior he intended for both men and women to follow.⁵⁹

⁵⁴ The first part of the hadith that mentions Fatima’s request for help from the Prophet ﷺ is in *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, no. 3075 and *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, no. 2727. The second part of the hadith in which the Prophet recommends dividing the responsibilities between them is collected in *Muṣannaf Ibn Abī Shayba* 16:71, no. 31018, but declared weak (*mursal da‘īf*) by the *muḥaqqiq*. Irrespective of its grading, scholars have questioned whether this incident establishes a binding legal precedent.

⁵⁵ See Ibn Qudāma, *al-Mughnī*, 10:226; Ibn al-Mullaqin, *al-Tawḍīḥ li sharḥ al-Jāmi‘ al-ṣaḥīḥ*, ed. Khālid al-Rabbāt and Jum‘a Fathī, 36 vols. (Dār al-Nawādir, 2008), 25:40–41.

⁵⁶ Ibn Abī al-Dunyā, *al-Nafaqa ‘alā al-‘iyāl*, ed. Najm ‘Abd al-Raḥmān Khalaf, 2 vols. (Dār Ibn al-Qayyim, 1990), <https://shamela.ws/book/13075/545>; *Musnad al-Bazzār*, no. 1474. There is some weakness in the chain, but it is supported by other narrations. See Ibn al-Athīr, *Usd al-ghāba fī ma‘rifat al-ṣaḥāba*, 7:17–18, <https://shamela.ws/book/1110/3291#p1>.

⁵⁷ *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, no. 5363; *Musnad Aḥmad*, no. 24903.

⁵⁸ *Musnad Aḥmad*, no. 24903; *Ṣaḥīḥ Ibn Hibbān*, nos. 5675, 5677.

⁵⁹ Ibn Battāl, *Sharḥ Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, ed. Yāsir bin Ibrāhīm, 10 vols. (Maktabat al-Rushd, 2003), 7:542.

Finances

Men were the default financial providers for their families. Wealthy companions like ‘Abd al-Rahman bin ‘Awf took pride in sustaining their households along with the broader community through acts of charity. Others, such as Abu Bakr, while more modest in wealth, remained consistent in meeting his family’s needs and was known for his personal sacrifices, including spending his entire fortune in support of the Prophet during critical moments. Even rulers were not exempt from this ethic. As caliphs, ‘Umar bin al-Khattab and ‘Umar bin ‘Abd al-‘Aziz were both known to keep meticulous accounts of state expenditures and take deliberate care to provide for their families without indulging in extravagance. Later figures such as Imam Abu Hanifa took up side businesses to support their dependents while dedicating themselves to scholarship. Biographical texts, like Ibn Sa‘d’s *Tabaqat* and al-Dhahabi’s *Siyar*, record many early scholars engaging in professions such as trading, textile production, and craftsmanship to maintain financial independence and fulfill their familial obligations.

While not expected to be primary providers, women, too, were financial actors, supporting their families and contributing generously to charitable causes. In one well-known instance, Zaynab, the wife of ‘Abdullah bin Mas‘ud, asked the Prophet ﷺ whether she could give her zakat to her husband, who was struggling financially. The Prophet reassured her that she would be rewarded twice—once for fulfilling her obligation, and again for supporting her household.⁶⁰ Umm Salama also sought the Prophet’s permission to spend her wealth on her children, and he assured her that she would be rewarded for it.⁶¹ In another case, Asma’, the aunt of Jabir bin ‘Abdullah, requested permission to cultivate her palm trees after her divorce. The Prophet ﷺ not only allowed it, but encouraged her, praising her intent to use her earnings for charity and righteous deeds.⁶²

In premodern societies, family survival depended on everyone contributing according to their means and capacity.⁶³ Work was often embedded within the social fabric of extended households and neighborhoods, and included farming,

⁶⁰ This ruling does not apply to a husband, as one’s zakat may not be given to those whose financial maintenance is already an obligatory responsibility (e.g., wife and dependent children).

⁶¹ *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, no. 5369.

⁶² *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, no. 1483.

⁶³ For more, see Stephanie Coontz, *Marriage, a History: How Love Conquered Marriage* (Penguin Books, 2006).

textile production, trade, and education—areas in which women were particularly active. Even domestic tasks such as cooking and childcare were not isolated duties but part of a broader ecosystem of mutual support among extended families and neighbors. This dynamic was especially visible during the Mamluk period (13th–16th centuries), when urban life in cities like Cairo, Damascus, and Jerusalem saw widespread wage labor. Many women, regardless of marital status, were employed as midwives, peddlers, hairdressers, and textile workers including spinners, embroiderers, and weavers.⁶⁴ Even women from elite, scholarly families like ‘A’isha bint Muhammad (d. 736/1336) in Damascus supported herself by working a loom.⁶⁵ Likewise, Dayfa bint ‘Umar (d. 728/1328) whose husband was chronically ill, assumed full financial responsibility for their household. Even after his recovery, she continued to manage their affairs and, following his death, raised their children independently on her earnings.⁶⁶ Elite men and women across the Islamic world also played a public financial role through charitable endowments.⁶⁷ They established schools, mosques, hospitals, and other institutions, often using their personal wealth. These acts of patronage reflected not only their piety and social standing but also the broader Islamic ethic of shared responsibility: financial stewardship was a virtue upheld by both men and women in service of their families and societies.

Dower

The practice of dower (*mahr*) in Muslim marriages offers another example of both legal consistency and cultural flexibility. The Qur’an mandates *mahr* as a required gift from the husband to the wife, yet the form, timing, and amount of that gift have historically varied in accordance with local customs and individual circumstances. One well-known Prophetic precedent illustrates this range. When a man approached the Prophet ﷺ seeking to marry but lacked any material means, the Prophet asked whether he had memorized any parts of the Qur’an. Upon confirming that he had, the Prophet declared, “I marry her to you for what you

⁶⁴ Yossef Rapoport, *Marriage, Money and Divorce in Medieval Islamic Society* (Cambridge University Press, 2005), 32–33.

⁶⁵ Rapoport, *Marriage, Money and Divorce*, 34.

⁶⁶ Rapoport, *Marriage, Money and Divorce*, 35–36.

⁶⁷ See, for example, Minlib Dallh, “Accumulate but Distribute: Islamic Emphasis on the Establishment of *Waqf* (Pious Endowment),” *Religion and Development* 2 (2023): 21–40; Şerife Eroğlu Memiş, “Benefactresses of *Waqf* and Good Deeds: Charitable Women in Ottoman Jerusalem, 1703–1831,” *Jerusalem Quarterly* no. 72 (2017): 48–57.

know of the Qur'an.”⁶⁸ This moment became foundational in demonstrating that *mahr* could be educational or service-based, so long as it held recognized value.

Classical jurists across the legal schools upheld this principle, even as they debated minimum amounts, acceptable forms, and enforceability. These rulings often reflected the social and economic realities of their time. In the Mamluk period, for instance, the structure and payment of *mahr* became increasingly diverse. Before the end of the 13th century, husbands typically fulfilled their financial obligations by purchasing necessities like food and clothing directly for their wives. By the early 14th century, however, a shift occurred: some husbands began to provide maintenance through regular cash stipends. By the 15th century, such cash payments had become a widespread and normalized form of *nafaqa* (marital support).⁶⁹ Marriage contracts during this era also reveal a wide array of practices concerning the timing of the *mahr*. Some agreements stipulated immediate, full payment at the time of marriage. Others divided the payment into annual installments or deferred the amount entirely, rendering it a debt payable upon the wife's demand. These contractual variations underscore that while *mahr* is a legal requirement, it was negotiated through mutual agreement, social norms, and the practical needs of each couple.⁷⁰

Intimacy

While the legal tradition often foregrounds a husband's right to intimacy, from the time of the Prophet ﷺ, sexual satisfaction was recognized as a right of wives as well. A telling example comes from the household of Abu al-Darda'.⁷¹ When Salman al-Farisi visited and found Abu al-Darda's wife in a visibly neglected state, she explained that her husband had “no need for this world.” Abu al-Darda's excessive fasting, night prayer, and asceticism had left little room for marital companionship. Salman reminded him that one's spouse has rights and they must be honored. When they brought the matter to the Prophet ﷺ, he affirmed Salman's counsel, underscoring that even the pursuit of piety must not come at the cost of intimacy and care within marriage.

⁶⁸ *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, no. 5087.

⁶⁹ Rapoport, *Marriage, Money and Divorce*, 59.

⁷⁰ Rapoport, *Marriage, Money and Divorce*, 53.

⁷¹ *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, no. 1968.

In another instance, a woman approached ‘Umar bin al-Khattab during his caliphate to complain about her husband.⁷² She described him as constantly engaged in prayer and fasting. ‘Umar, interpreting this as a compliment, praised the man’s piety. But one of the companions present, Ka‘b bin Sur, saw what ‘Umar had missed: the woman was not lauding her husband’s devotion—she was lamenting that his spiritual routine left no space for intimacy. Recognizing his oversight, ‘Umar appointed Ka‘b to arbitrate between them.

Perhaps the most poignant example comes from ‘Umar’s nighttime patrols. During one of his rounds in Medina, he overheard a woman reciting verses of poetry expressing longing for her absent husband, who had been away on a military expedition.⁷³ Concerned, ‘Umar investigated and consulted his daughter Hafsa, asking how long a woman could reasonably remain without intimacy. Her answer—six months—prompted ‘Umar to institute a policy limiting the duration of military deployment, ensuring that spouses were not separated indefinitely. Later jurists like Ibn Taymiyya noted that this timeframe was an approximation and a woman’s sexual needs should be assessed according to her particular circumstances.⁷⁴ Or as al-Buhuti framed it: Just as marriage helps a man guard against the harm of unchecked desire, it serves the same purpose for a woman—which is why sexual intimacy is a mutual right.⁷⁵

Dynamics

Even in the Prophet’s time, notable differences in marital dynamics existed across regions. Meccan women were generally more reserved and deferential toward their husbands, while Medinan women were known for their assertiveness. When ‘Umar bin al-Khattab expressed concern over the boldness of Medinan women—who, in his view, challenged the deference he was accustomed to—the Prophet ﷺ simply smiled, signaling that Islam accommodated a spectrum of marital interaction rather than mandating a singular model.⁷⁶

⁷² Ibn ‘Abd al-Barr, *al-Istī‘āb fī ma‘rifat al-aṣḥāb*, ed. ‘Alī Muḥammad al-Bajāwī, 4 vols. (Maktaba Nahḍa Miṣr, 1960), 3:1318–19.

⁷³ *Muṣannaf ‘Abd al-Razzāq: kitāb al-ṭalāq, bāb ḥaqq al-mar’a ‘alā zawjihā wa fī kam tashtāq*.

⁷⁴ Ibn Taymiyya, *al-Mustadrak ‘alā majmū‘ fatāwa shaykh al-Islām Aḥmad ibn Taymiyya*, ed. Muḥammad bin Muḥammad Qāsim, 5 vols. (N.p., n.d.), 4:215, 218; *al-Fatāwā al-kubrā*, 5:481.

⁷⁵ Al-Buhūtī, *Khashshāf al-qinā’*, 2549.

⁷⁶ *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, no. 5191.

This flexibility continued into the caliphate of ‘Umar himself. On one occasion, a man came to seek his counsel about difficulties with his wife, only to overhear ‘Umar raising his voice inside his own home. Embarrassed, the man turned to leave. When ‘Umar emerged and asked why he had come, the man sheepishly confessed he had come to complain about his wife, but seeing that even the Caliph faced similar challenges, he thought better of it. ‘Umar, in turn, advised him to be patient and overlook his wife’s faults in light of all that women do to support and sustain their households.⁷⁷

The Prophet’s own household further exemplified this ethos. His wives voiced their frustrations openly and, at times, even gave him the silent treatment. Their assertiveness was so striking that ‘Umar once remarked in astonishment, “Do you not fear Allah’s wrath?”—not merely because they were speaking back to their husband, but because they were addressing the Messenger of God.⁷⁸ In a well-known exchange, Abu Bakr came to visit the Prophet ﷺ, only to hear ‘A’isha raising her voice at the Messenger of God.⁷⁹ Appalled by her boldness, Abu Bakr chastised her, but the Prophet ﷺ did not—reflecting a broad range of acceptable behavior and norms.

At the same time, we find various examples of female companions who were very deferential to their husbands. Asma’ bint Abi Bakr was known for her remarkable dedication to serving her husband, often going to great lengths to fulfill her responsibilities. On one occasion, the Prophet ﷺ encountered her carrying a heavy load of date stones on her head, so he offered her a ride on his mount. She shyly declined out of consideration for her husband al-Zubayr, who was known for his protective jealousy.⁸⁰ In another instance, Umm Sulaym, the mother of Anas bin Malik, displayed remarkable composure after the death of her young son.⁸¹ Only after serving her husband dinner and spending the night intimately with him did she gently inform him of their child’s passing. The Prophet, upon hearing the news, prayed for blessings in their lineage.

⁷⁷ Although this narration/story lacks a sound chain, it has been cited in books of tradition as a source of model behavior. Al-Dhahabī, *al-Kabā’ir* (Dār al-Nadwa al-Jadīda, n.d.), 179.

⁷⁸ *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, no. 5191.

⁷⁹ *Musnad Aḥmad*, no. 18394. Graded *ṣaḥīḥ* (rigorously authentic) by al-Arnā’ūt. Also reported in *Sunan Abī Dāwūd* (no. 4999), which was graded as *ṣaḥīḥ li ghayrihi* (elevated to the level of *ṣaḥīḥ* by corroborating reports) by al-Albānī in *al-Silsila*.

⁸⁰ *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, no. 5224.

⁸¹ *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, no. 2144d.

Conclusion

Any honest conversation about marriage today must account for the broader systemic forces that have redefined what family life now entails. Government policies, market demands, and ideological shifts have engineered the family structure in ways that are neither neutral nor accidental. Many families are no longer supported by extended kin networks, community institutions, or religious infrastructures as they once were. Instead, they are increasingly isolated, often forced to rely on two incomes to survive, to outsource the moral and intellectual development of children to the state, and to navigate emotional and spiritual needs in an economy that monetizes every available ounce of human energy. For some Muslims, the desire to revive “traditional” gender roles (often understood as a household with a male breadwinner and a stay-at-home wife) reflects a longing to resist these forces—to push back against a system that seems designed to erode the very conditions necessary for healthy, God-conscious families. While this impulse is often grounded in faith, it is not always sufficient. Fixating on rigid roles or idealized models of the past, divorced from the historical contexts that sustained them, does not adequately address the complex realities families face today. To thrive as a Muslim community, we need to deliberate on strategic, collective efforts to counter the social and economic stressors that undermine marriage.

Maintaining strong marriages is crucial—not just for the values they uphold and the rights they protect, such as unity, respect, commitment, lawful intimacy, inheritance, and lineage, but for what they represent. Marriage cultivates the ability to follow, to sacrifice, to think collectively, and to take risks for the greater good. It serves as a microcosm of the broader *umma* in that weak marriages often reflect deeper fractures within society itself. Without rebuilding the communal and familial support systems that once cushioned the effects of marital breakdown, divorce will continue to be deeply destabilizing. The goal, then, is to foster resilient marriages that can adapt to evolving social and economic realities. Many marriages today endure when spouses divide their responsibilities between public and private spheres. Others work effectively when both partners share and shift responsibilities as needed. Some families rely on dual incomes to survive, while others prioritize one parent staying home. What ultimately matters is that we organize our

marriages and households in ways that, despite modern pressures threatening family cohesion, protect and preserve them.

While we might not be able to reengineer our societies overnight, we can begin by reframing our mindset. Anyone who is married knows that responsibilities are rarely split neatly in half. Circumstances, whether cultural, financial, or personal, often demand that one partner take on more than what is strictly required in Islam. There is so much value in reorienting perspectives and thinking: what would it mean to approach even the most mundane tasks with the intention of pleasing Allah? A chore taken up for the sake of harmony, for the sake of the family, or even just to get through the day can also be an act of worship. This doesn't mean one should never ask for help or remain silent about unmet needs. But there is untapped strength in knowing that one's effort, even if unrecognized by a spouse, is appreciated by al-Shakur. The Prophet ﷺ promised that no one makes a sacrifice for the sake of Allah except that He will replace it with something better. That "better" might take many forms: peace of heart, the flourishing of your children, an unexpected job opportunity—and, in all cases, reward in the Hereafter. So if your marriage is not harmful, but simply hard, know that your endurance may be among your most beloved deeds to Allah. In a time when family structures are unraveling and loneliness is widespread, your quiet striving may be the thread that holds a community together and the reason you are raised in rank by the One who sees it all.