Islam and the Family

While the warp of society is the individual person and the woof is social order, the unit of the design is the family. Families in which mutual understanding, sincerity and tenderness reign, form details of a harmonious pattern. But a family in confusion and disarray distorts and mars the pattern. The instinct for survival is innate in human beings. Producing children is the expression of one urge of this instinct, for a child seems like an extension of one's own personality, and a guarantee of the continuance of the same life-force. The primary origin of the urge to found families is sought by many thinkers in this instinct for survival.

The need to feed and support a family incites a man to industrial productivity. Other thinkers hold that the primary urge towards family-founding was merely the sex instinct; others favour the gregarious instinct; others regard wedlock as a mere commercial transaction between families entered into for the profit of both. In fact, communal living in society requires families as its units of construction. To degrade the pure love between husband and wife merely to sex, profit or protection, is to deny human nature at its highest.

Some say that, since in the inchoate days of human living the woman as a weaker being could not exist except under a man's protection, family life is merely a feminine institution imposed on man. This is manifest nonsense: for it ignores a man's need of woman, which may be different from woman's need of man, but is just as deeply and inextricably a part of his nature. True, man has to be the breadwinner in most cases. But he needs his mate as a partner in happiness, in joy and in sound living. In marriage is the end of loneliness. Each sex needs the other. This is why "male and female made He them."

God implanted the sex instinct. God created sex differences. He created the survival instinct, the security instinct and the society instinct of gregariousness. All these were part of His providence in preparing mankind to be His joyful family Sociologists give each instinct its due weight in the scheme. They say that the exact role of each instinct varies with the changes in social structure. In primitive society the need to find food and housing is of primary importance. In the ancient agricultural community the need for children became paramount since many hands make light work. Today the sex urge has come very much to the fore, since humanity has devised means to achieve adequate food, satisfactory housing and machines to do the work. But over and above the instincts, the urge to love and the need to be loved are amongst the highest attributes of human nature.

Islam answers the call of nature affirmatively, with its insistence on the family as the best

safeguard of public virtue, and its asseveration that it is the only right and legitimate way. It is written in the Sura XVI: Nahl- "The Bee" verse 72: "God has made mates for you of your own nature and made for you of them children and grandchildren and posterity, and provided for you sustenance of the best. Are they then going to believe in vain things and not be grateful for God's favours?"

Islam sets out to protect young people from being led astray by the strength of the God-implanted sexual urge in the years before their character and conscience have matured and their will is governed by discretion. That is why it lays on parents the responsibility of I admonishing youth, and of imparting rules of. life and guidelines of prudence which will lead to godliness and the natural use of the power of procreation. It also holds parents responsible for arranging early I marriages for those who are mature enough to wed. Young people not yet I economically capable of supporting a family may find the thrust of the sex urge so strong that, without the guiding hand of their parents on the 1 reins, the horses of nature may run away with them and carry them into danger or into the trap of illicit sex. Parents must steer the life-force into I its God-given legitimate channels where peace of mind and calm of conscience accompany the happiness of a shared life.

The Prophet is reported to have preached thus from the pulpit of the mosque: "O Muslim community! Your daughters are like ripe fruit on a tree. Fruit must be picked at its optimum moment; otherwise the sun or other agencies will rot or spoil it. You must likewise give your daughters in marriage at the moment when they are ripe, and neither later nor sooner. If you leave them hanging about too long, their inevitable , corruption will be your fault. They are human, and their human needs must be met." Ali bin Asbat wrote a reply to a letter which he had received from the 5th Imam, thus: "I find no young men who are suitable and fitted to be husbands for my daughters. What then is my duty?" In answer the Imam wrote: "Do not wait until you find young men who are exactly to your liking in all respects. For our Holy Prophet said: 'If you do not find young people to wed your daughters who correspond with your personal desires, have regard only to their character, especially their morals and their religion, and let the qualifications you require in husbands for your daughters be faith and morals alone, since with these a young man makes a satisfactory husband; and if you choose someone without these qualifications you are personally responsible for misleading and perverting your young people."

Thus Islam not only does not put obstacles in the way of matrimony, but turns this force of nature to the advantage of society and of the individual for his physical wellbeing, mental health, calm of spirit and contentment of heart. Islam regards marriage as a sacred union of

hearts, a source of serenity and security for both partners. To fulfil this function it needs the qualities of purity, loving-kindness, humanity, gentleness, goodness and faith in the depths of the heart. As it is written in Sura XXX: "Rome" verse 21: " Amongst God's signs for you is this, that He created mates for you from among yourselves for you to dwell with in tranquillity. It is He who put love and compassion between you. Verily in these are signs for those who reflect." Islam lays down clear rules to govern the relationships within the family. Sura IV Nisa'a -"The Women" calls marriage "the firm bond" and is concerned throughout the first 42 verses with the practical details of the contract of marriage and its fulfillment. The sense of belonging together is nourished. Fairness governs the share each partner gives and takes in the compact. Each gives according to their ability and each takes according to their need. As Sura 11: Baqara - "The Heifer" affirms in verse 228: "Wife and husband, women and men, have reciprocal and commensurable rights according to what is equitable."

Islam pays the closest and most meticulous attention to the capacities of each sex with regard to their occupation, profession and work. The man has the duty of being the breadwinner and providing for material needs and the production of things. The woman is the housekeeper with the duty of providing for the family's needs and for the production of new people, for nursing the new generation and caring for the upbringing of posterity. Islam recognises the natural consequences of the way a woman is made, and will not allow her to be demeaned or degraded in any way; but preserves her from the wickedness of those who would lead her astray into corruption, and confers upon her a dignity, both at home and out of doors, which is worthy of her calling. It is of course possible that in an emergency a woman may be called to undertake tasks outside her home. But Islam seeks to avoid the kind of contacts between the sexes in the course of their employment which could turn fellowship into familiarity and comradeship into concupiscence. Therefore women must not dress in a provocative or enticing fashion nor titillate men's sexual lusts so that the madness which leads to promiscuity of intercourse is aroused.

Like any other institution, the family and its home needs a responsible head. Without a firm hand at the helm a family can drift in confusion. Either the wife or the husband must therefore take the lead, and nature shows that in general it is more fitting for the man to steer, even if in exceptional cases the woman must take command. The man, in accepting the responsibility of the household, its livelihood, its wellbeing, its children and their care, merits the authority of a head, because his greater strength, perseverance and endurance make him more fitted than the woman to carry the heavy burden of safeguarding the family from collapse and confusion. Further, woman is a creature of emotion, and quicker to be swayed by feelings. Woman is more

ruled by her heart and man more by his head. So Islam gives the prime responsibility to the person of reason, precisely as Article 213 of the most recent constitution of France does. At the same time, Islam lays down that teamwork, partnership, consultation and joint planning are to be the rule. The man is on no account to be left free to pursue his self-willed desires regardless. He must definitely never tyrannise over his wife or abuse or bully her. It is written in Sura IV Nisa'a -"The Women'. verse 19: "Believers! You may not take over a brother's widow without her consent. You may not treat your wives harshly. You may not goad wife into suing you for a khula' (divorce) by which she has to a part of the dower which you gave her - save only if she be guilty of forfeit lewd conduct. Nay! live with your wives in kindness and equity. Should you dislike them for something, that very thing may be a point through which God will bring much blessing."

The husband, in shouldering the burden of external affairs for the support of the family has full control of everything relevant to his task. But inside the walls Of the home the wife is in full control, and hers is the duty of arranging the details of daily living, the disposition of the household effects and the upbringing of the children. The Prophet said: "The man is the breadwinner responsible for the family, while the wife has the responsibility for the house and for her husband and for the children.-' (Majmoo'é wa ram p.6/ Collections and Remains.)

Modern disrespect for the bond of marriage is due to the negligence of this high conception of wedlock. Instead it has been degraded by a mass of petty dreams and twisted imaginations. Men's thinking about marriage was in ruins before their families began to fall apart. Too many have entered on the married state without a thought for the importance of harmony of mind and spirit between man and wife. Fortune hunters, Casanovas, women-chasers prizing a pretty face above all else, have pushed the spiritual values out of sight and trodden their own best interests underfoot.

The prevalence of such badly founded families forebodes a tragic future. The deep incompatibility of thought between man and wife sets them as far apart as the poles. The gap between them gapes wider daily. Contentment and peace of heart flee from them. They get on each other's nerves. The harmony which ethical values, unselfishness and human affection bring, as both sides do all they can to strengthen the spiritual life of each other, departs. A family must be founded firmly on due consideration of the environmental conditions, the proper setting for the wife, and the compatibility of the partners' ways of thinking and of their moral standards. Marriage must be thought of as holy and basic. Only from this correct viewpoint can the inevitable difficulties of living together be satisfactorily settled. Islam has paid due attention to all the deleterious consequences of wrongly based marriage, its divisions and

unhappiness. It therefore founds the family not on fortune or passion or outward beauty or any material things, but on faith and virtue, and chastity and purity and spiritual qualities and affections, and piety both in the man and ID the woman. The Prophet is reported to have said: "Whosoever takes a wife merely because of her beauty will never find what he sought in her. Whose takes a wife solely for her fortune, the Lord will abandon him. Seek therefore a wife whose beauty is that of faith and whose fortune is purity of living." (Vassa'el, Vol. 3, p.6.)

In the book "Man la yahdhur" (p.209), "There is no institution more beloved than marriage" is stated as Islam's policy for matrimony. Persons who seek to avoid founding a family on unreasonable or false grounds are sternly rebuked, and condemned for every form of pretext to which they resort for perverting the God-given force of sex from its proper use. In the book "Safeene al-Bahar" (Vol. 1, p.561), we read: "Wedlock and matrimony belong to my religion. Whosoever protests against this way of life excludes himself from my religion and is not one of mine." Similarly Islam is against the wedding of people who lack the qualities of personality and the excellences of spirit which are required: and against wedding into families which do not profit from religious upbringing in moral standards. As is written in the "Vassa'el" - chapter 7 of the .'Book of Wedlock" "the Prophet in a sermon said: Avoid beautiful plants and flowers which grow by the side of filthy and polluted waters.' The Prophet was asked: 'O Prophet of Allah! what is a plant by a stagnant pool?' He replied: A beautiful woman brought up in a perverse family that has not known the restraints of instruction'."

It is natural that consorts who are not brought up on absolute moral standards and religious laws can never be sure of true family happiness and blessedness. The fruit of such marriages can only be delinquent children, rough, violent, without serenity or security of spirit. Therefore Islam, to ensure the happiness of both parties, lays particular stress on matters of morals and of mentality. It is to guard against the production of a generation that is corrupt and perverted that Islam seeks to avoid matrimony with members of families that are polluted and degraded. If young people, at the moment when they have to choose their life's partner, would do so in accordance with Islamic rules and regulations instead of only looking at externals, and weigh the realities which are vital to happiness, setting aside false thinking inspired by polluted passions that so swiftly pass, there is no doubt that the unhappiness and family disasters brought on family life by the devotees of sexual freedom and permissiveness would all very rapidly disappear into thin air. Yet some of today's youth have been taught that a trial-marriage, to see if a couple suit each other in intercourse, is the right way and the ideal preparation for happy life-partnership. How can they think that a brief experience of a fleeting pleasure of two bodies can plumb the depths of the spiritual qualities, mental abilities, moral gifts and

personality-traits of another soul? To expect to found an eternal relationship on a few moments of pleasure is a nonsensical piece of illogic. That should be enough to condemn it out of hand, quite apart from all the moral and spiritual damage which such temporary liaisons cannot fail to cause. The inner qualities of a personality only appear in a long period of a shared life. It is the ever-changing scene and stage of their living together which reveals the truth of two partners' inward nature to each other. Patience, forbearance, equanimity, steadiness, contentment, selflessness, self-sacrifice are discovered when life's pressures crowd in on the soul. How can brief moments of rest and fun and trips a deux penetrate to the deep ethical characteristics? Can a visit to the cinema or some other place of entertainment reveal their true selves to a couple? Indeed, in trial-marriages both partners try to conceal their bad sides and put on a good mask to fool each other.

Can a young man in the heat of passion make a decision which is the most fateful of his life? Can a trial-marriage ensure that there is no difference in spirit and no weak point in their relationship? And how can a young person ruled by the conditions of his years when the inclination to satisfy sexual instincts is so strong. weigh the essential conditions for a sound marriage dispassionately and detachedly? How can he be sure that quarrels and differences will not arise in the future? It is for this reason that Islam recommends that, before the final signing of a marriage contract, the young people should meet each other and talk; but also, and far more important, they should get an assessment of their proposed partner's character and tastes and traits and capacities from independent observers who are able to judge from long acquaintance.

Or, since the family happiness depends in the first place on the equality of the relations between man and wife in their shared life, the firmer the spiritual and ethical bonds the surer the happiness of the household and the greater its ability to stand the shocks of life in selfless self-sacrifice and union. This is why the Prophet said. ."'Best of my people is the man who shows his family not harshness but perfect kindness and goodness." (Moral Excellence. p.247 "Makarem-ul-Akhlaq".) And again ("Man la yahdhur" p.625): "Best amongst you is he who treats his family well: and I am kindest of all to my own family." Similarly the wife should treat her husband with kindness, and this is called her ."Sacred Jehad" (Tafseer-ad-Dorr al-manthoor ."Gems of Wisdom").

One of the sad obstacles to early marriages today is the difficulty which finance poses for young people. Provision of the marriage portion, expensive ceremonies, the high cost of houses, and a dozen other extravagant charges are too much for the average youth. Islam insists , that the state should take steps to enable these difficulties to be overcome in the

interests of the institution of matrimony. The book "Gems of I Wisdom" reports the Prophet of Islam as saying: "It is an auspicious and beneficent act that the bride's family should make their demands for dowry and terms of the marriage contract mild and lenient."

Excessive demands may reveal not only that the bride's family but possibly also the bride herself is grasping and hard. The chapter on marriage portions in the book '"Vassa'el" tells the following story. One day the Apostle of God was seated with the assembly of his companions when a young woman rushed in and after the customary courteous salutations said: "O Apostle of God I want a young husband." The Prophet turned to all those present and asked: "Has anyone an inclination to take this woman to wife?" One man said he was willing. I The Prophet asked what dowry he would give. He replied: "I have nothing I can give." So the Prophet said. "No!" The woman returned on a later occasion and requested to be married. No one replied. Finally the same young man who had no fortune or property at his disposition made a sign, and the Prophet addressed him thus: "Do you know the Qur'an?" He said: "Sure!" The gracious Apostle then decreed: "I will marry you to this woman at the price of the dowry which will consist in your teaching her a portion of the Qur'an every day."

Islam therefore refuses to recognise that financial difficulties may put obstacles in the way of young people's matrimony. It allows indigent and needy persons to found families by law. Islam regards fear of poverty and of involvement as false excuses for avoiding the divine law of life in wedlock, and says that Providence knows a family's needs and will not let them fall into deprivation. It is written in Sura XXIV: Nur–"Light", verse 32: "Provide the means by which worthy and fitting persons who have no spouse may marry. If they are poor and indigent God out of His gracious care will supply their needs."

Of course hard work and industry is the way in which a man should supply his needs. When a man undertakes the responsibilities of matrimony, in order to make both ends meet he must increase his activities and his hard work. This is one of the functions of marriage in raising the standard of living for the whole of society.