

In the Name of God

How can we build strong family ties?

In this episode you will learn the following:

1. Developing the sense of responsibility toward oneself and others;
2. All of us are responsible;
3. Three qualities of a responsible person:
 - a. Fear of God
 - b. Tolerance
 - c. Loyalty

In the previous lesson, we said that the number one factor which strengthens the family bond is shaping the family based on the instructions of the Quran.

The 2nd factor is feeling responsible with regards to the role assigned to us in the family.

The feeling of responsibility

Usually one of the causes of success and growth in a person is sensitivity and care with regards to the role that is entrusted to them. This sense of responsibility is first with regards to ourselves and then others. We are responsible toward all aspects of our being and even though Allah is the Provider and source for all that we need, we must first create the means within ourselves to receive His blessings and provisions.

Responsible toward ourselves

We have to live a purposeful life; the purpose being spiritual growth and proximity to God in this world, and an eternal happiness in the next. Furthermore, we should define and specify an aim for our daily life and consider ourselves responsible in reaching it. We as human beings are responsible toward our time, our health, the blessings we have in life, our energy, our youth, our wealth, our faith, and much much more. If we fail to use any of them in a path that would serve the objective of our creation, or even worse, if we use them in ways that Allah has made forbidden, then we will be held accountable on the Day of Judgment.

Responsible toward others

On another level, we are responsible with regards to the society and family we live in. Our discussion in this course revolves around our responsibility concerning our family members and the cases and examples where we must do our best to fulfill this responsibility.

A binding duty

Once a person is entrusted with a responsibility, it becomes binding on the person to fulfil it. The man who is the head of the family cannot say that as a father I don't care about my children; Let them be what they want even if it means risking their salvation and prosperity in the hereafter. Nor can the man as a husband say that I don't care if my wife becomes felicitous in the other world or not. As is also the case regarding women. Once a woman has been entrusted with the responsibility of children and husband, certain sacrifices are necessary in order for the family, which is the most sacred foundation in Islam, to grow, flourish, and reach its full potential to reach prosperity in this world and the next.

The story of the 8th Imam

In the story of the 8th Imam (AS), we see that Ma'mun, the Abbasid Caliph, proposes caliphate to the Imam prior to proposing heir apparenacy to him, telling the Imam that I see you worthier of this role than myself. He stretches his hand to swear an oath of allegiance with the Imam but the Imam refuses. He tells Ma'mun, 'if God has entrusted the leadership of the Muslims to you, then it is upon you to fulfil it and you do not have the right to entrust it to others. If God has not entrusted it to you, then what is it that you want to entrust to me? It is not your right'. Ma'mun becomes silent, thinks for a while and then proposes heir apparenacy to the Imam. The moral of this story is that, no matter how big or small our responsibilities are, we are not allowed to shift them onto another person's shoulders or forsake them. Whether it is rulership over the Islamic nation as a caliph or leading a family as a father, there is in fact no escaping the responsibilities that Allah has entrusted us with. Of course, there are exceptions like all other matters in life, but that's a discussion for another time.

Everyone is responsible

When one is responsible toward a duty, it means that they will be asked about it in the next world and will be held accountable for it.

There is a beautiful narration from the Holy Prophet (S) that says,

أَلَا كُنتُمْ رَاعٍ وَ كُنتُمْ مَسْئُولٌ عَنْ رَعِيَّتِهِ¹

Beware that all of you are responsible with regards to your subjects and will be held accountable about them.

Then the Holy Prophet (S), gives three examples:

¹ Warram Collection, Vol. 1, p. 6.

فَالْأَمِيرُ عَلَى النَّاسِ رَاعٍ وَهُوَ مَسْئُولٌ عَنْ رَعِيَّتِهِ

The Amir (commander) is someone who leads a society and is held accountable with regards to his subjects and on the Day of Judgment he is questioned about them.

وَ الرَّجُلُ رَاعٍ عَلَى أَهْلِ بَيْتِهِ وَهُوَ مَسْئُولٌ عَنْهُمْ

A man is accountable with regards to his family and will be questioned about them.

How did you treat your children? What plans did you have for them? What about your wife? Did you fulfil her rights?

فَالْمَرْأَةُ رَاعِيَةٌ عَلَى أَهْلِ بَيْتِ بَعْلِهَا وَوَلَدِهِ وَهِيَ مَسْئُولَةٌ عَنْهُمْ

A woman is also held accountable and will be questioned about her husband's family and the children.

So, since children are God's trusts entrusted to both parents, hence, part of the responsibility of child raising is naturally entrusted to the mother as well.

After parents, children are the ones held responsible with regards to certain issues, once they religiously become of age and can distinguish between good and bad. They are responsible with regards to their parents meaning they have to respect them, do good to, and help them. Unfortunately, in certain cultures, the only function of parents is to cater the needs of the children until they reach a certain age. After that, the children leave the house and all ties between the parents and children are severed. They might see each other once a year on a birthday or New Year's celebration, and if the parent becomes ill and incapable of taking care of themselves due to old age, their next destination would be the retirement home until they die. Some might ask what is wrong with this scenario, but they would be the ones who have no understanding of spiritual growth, gratitude toward those

who have benefited us, and the objective of creation, which is to use all means in order to gain the proximity and satisfaction of Allah. Therefore, in Islam we have been taught to respect our parents and be kind to them, especially during their old age, and a correct treatment toward them has been placed alongside not ascribing any partners to Allah.

Children are also responsible regarding their brothers and sisters. The elders have to be protective of the younger ones and the younger ones respectful of the elders. There are numerous narrations from the Noble Prophet and his household on this matter that we will perhaps discuss some other time.

All people are somehow held accountable with the exception of those who are mentally impaired and they do not even have to pray.

Three qualities of a responsible person

1. Fear of God

When a person fears God, they say ‘why should I waste my time?’, ‘why should I sin? Sinning takes me to darkness.’ That is with regards to oneself.

The same applies with regards to others. For instance, a God-fearing father says, ‘my children are God’s trusts; I should take good care of them. I should not abuse my rights as a father or neglect the needs of my children. I should educate myself on how to raise my children in a way that brings God’s satisfaction and not do anything that would risk my children’s wellbeing in this world or the next.’

Naturally, a mother who is God-fearing would be cautious of her actions and treatment toward her husband and children as well. She would be more patient and compassionate with her kids and more understanding and supportive of her husband. She would help them find their way in life and facilitate them with the means to become contributing members of the society and pious servants of Allah.

If siblings are God-fearing, they do not oppress each other. The older ones would not abuse the younger ones or manipulate them to do things for them. Nor will the younger ones disrespect their older siblings or deprive them of their rights.

Fear of God keeps one precisely on the divine regulations and boundaries.

2. Tolerance

A responsible person entrusted with a duty has to do certain things for the people they are related with and at the same time entrust some duties to them. Naturally, others do not always fulfil their duties as expected of them. At times, they do well and at other times they don't. Now, the person in charge, like the father of the family who leads the family members, has to increase his tolerance and not become enraged when he encounters a problem or shortcoming on the part of one of the members.

Prophet Musa (AS) asks for tolerance

In the Noble Quran, when Prophet Musa (AS) is going toward the Pharaoh of Egypt to enjoin him to the way of truth, he prays to God to give him tolerance by saying,

رب اشرح لي صدري

My lord! Open my breast for me.²

The opening of the breast means that even when big problematic issues do immerge for us, we would not overreact. We know that the people we are in charge of are all humans and could slip.

² [20:25] Qarai translation.

Opening of the breast manifests itself in two ways:

- Tolerance of others: meaning we would not easily lose our temper at difficult times and
- Forgiving others: When others do a wrong action, we do not respond to them in the same wrong way, instead we respond through goodness.

That is the command of the Quran:

وَيَذُرُّونَ بِالْحَسَنَةِ السَّيِّئَةَ

And repel evil [conduct] with good.³

The same concept is mentioned in another chapter:

ادْفَعْ بِالَّتِي هِيَ أَحْسَنُ السَّيِّئَةَ

Repel ill [conduct] with that which is the best.⁴

Evil and good conduct are not the same and each leave their own impact.

Let's say someone in the family offends or upsets me with a behavior or speech. I could do two things:

1. Start shouting at them and use offensive language to express my anger and make the situation worse
2. Hear what they want to say and politely explain to them where they are wrong and try to find a solution in order to prevent such problems from repeating. This is what the Quran means by repel ill with that which is best.

Many of you have heard the story of the woman who used to throw rubbish on the Prophet's head as he was passing by the woman's house. The prophet (S) did

³ [13:22] Qarai translation.

⁴ [23:96] Qarai translation.

not repel evil with evil. After some time, the woman did not show up to do the same, the Prophet asked about her and found out that she was ill so he paid her a visit. The Jewish woman was deeply moved at such kindness. This is repelling evil with the best.

3. Loyalty

If one is entrusted with a responsibility, one has to stay loyal until the end. Some act responsible in the beginning but after some time they stop and no longer care about their duties.

A father is a father until the end. Some men stop carrying out their fatherly roles when they get a divorce from their wife. Some even stop seeing their children for a long time. We need to understand that certain ties are unbreakable. The responsibility of bringing another human being into the world is not one that can be taken lightly. And once we have been entrusted with it, we must do whatever we can to fulfill that duty to the best of our capacity. However, there are certain situations where a parent or child must make a great sacrifice in order to serve a greater objective, like that of war and defending the religion. This again is a discussion fit for another lesson.

So, in conclusion, the point is that each person is responsible toward their family and must do whatever they can in order to strengthen the bonds between the members and create the foundation for one another's growth and proximity to Allah.

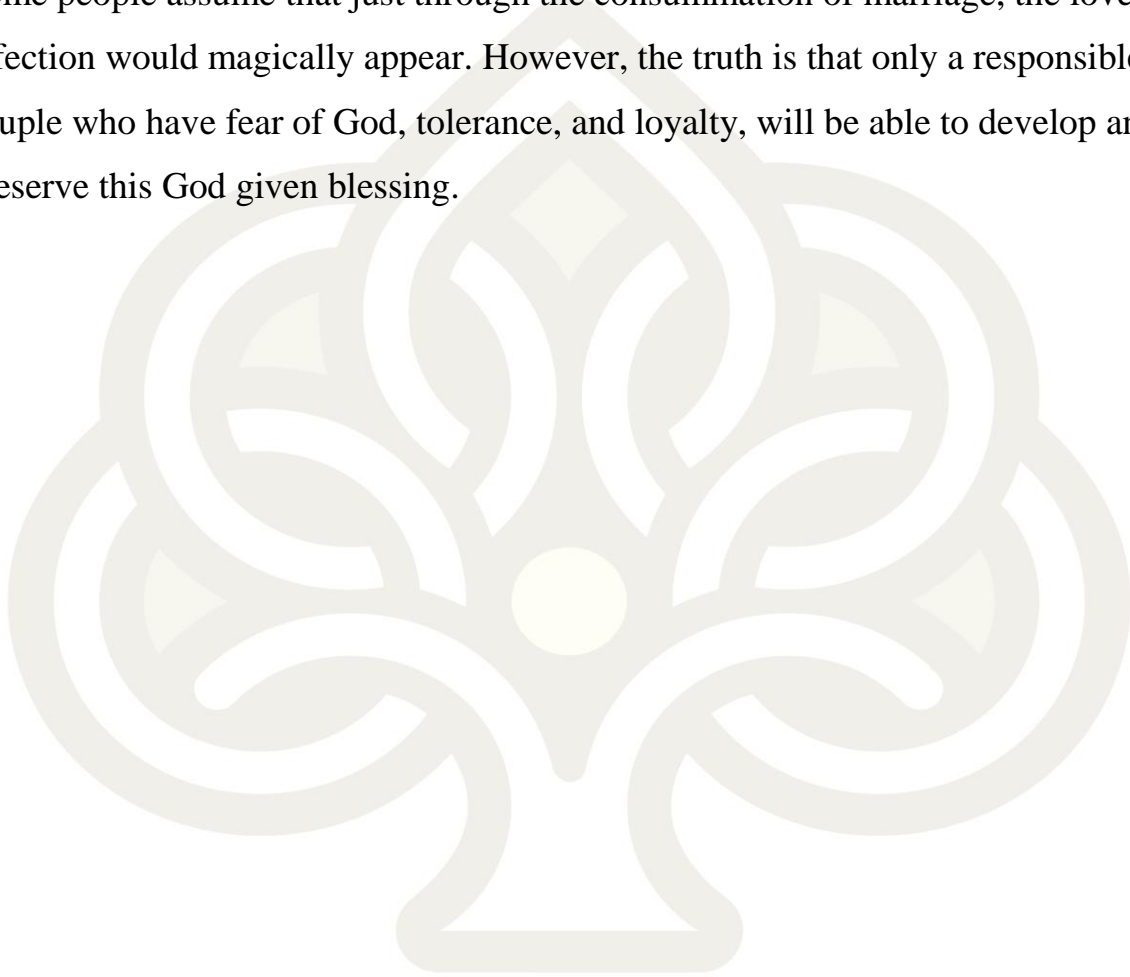
Marriage is not a mere written form between a man and a woman, and if we want our family to be the reflection of the verse:

و جعل بينكم مودة و رحمة⁵

And We have placed between you love and mercy.

Then we need to put special effort to make it a reality. One can say that marriage is a living creature that through the endeavors of the spouses, strives and grows, creating the groundwork for a prosperous hereafter.

Some people assume that just through the consummation of marriage, the love and affection would magically appear. However, the truth is that only a responsible couple who have fear of God, tolerance, and loyalty, will be able to develop and preserve this God given blessing.



⁵ Ar-Rum:21