According to Islam, heterosexuality is not only the natural order of life but is also the order most pleasing to Allah. The Quran affirms this when it says, “And He has created for you mates that you may find comfort in them.” (Quran 30:21). It is thus evident that Allah has blessed humans with the gift of sexual relationships to be enjoyed in marriage and within a complementary relationship. Furthermore, the Quran states, “And come not near unto adultery. It is an abomination and an evil way.” (Quran 19:31). This verse clearly indicates that both premarital and extramarital sexual relationships are grave sins.

In the Name of God, the Most Gracious, the Most Merciful

Mr. and Mrs. Siddiq migrated to the United States in the late 1980s from Pakistan. Sponsored by Mrs. Siddiq’s brother, they had a clear and simple goal: to avail better educational opportunities for their four children in the New World. Muhammad Uthman came to the United States as a graduate student in the mid-1990s. He studied computer engineering at a prestigious university, intending to return to his native Egypt. As it turned out, he met his future wife, a Syrian American, and decided to stay.

Mary Kiel was one of two siblings born to an Arab father and an American mother. With very little contact with her paternal family, Mary thought little about her identity, except as a born-and-bred American. However, things began to change once she started attending college, embarking herself on a journey of self-discovery.

The family unit is an important component of Islam, and all elements of a family are given due significance – from parents to children to spouses to kith and kin. The relationship and attitude towards one’s family members is part of one’s service to God.

In the Name of God, the Most Gracious, the Most Merciful

The mother is given greater importance, and the Quran recognizes this when it says, “God has given to the mother love and mercy, and equality. Parents must provide proper education to their children along with raising them to be morally-upright and responsible individuals striving for the betterment of society. The Prophet particularly emphasized the proper treatment of daughters and promised the reward of paradise for parents who raise their daughter(s) well. At the same time, God calls for moderation: “O you who believe! Let not your wealth, or your children, divert you from the remembrance of Allah; and do not spend it in such a way as to be blotted out; and be not party to the sinners.” (Quran 63:9). The Prophet Muhammad, in the Garment metaphor, narrates: "Whoever believes in Allah and the Last Day should do his best to marry (a wife) and raise his family; he is most assuredly treating the Garment of Allah that he has been given to him with justice and equity; for whosoever does justice and equity to his wife is justified by Allah as his fellow and helper; hence whosoever wrongs his wife, that is like the wrongdoing of a foolish person; and whosoever wrongs his wife, that is analogous to the wrong done to her, and she is a fellow.” (Quran 4:34).
IMPORTANCE OF GUARDING CHASTITY

Islam considers sexual relations outside of marriage, whether premarital or extramarital, to be grave sins. God commands, “And come not near unto adultery. It is indeed an abomination and an evil way” (Quran 17:32). The consequences of such sexual relationships, which come without the responsibilities of marriage, include emotional and physical, mental illness, family disruption and even violence.

Islam recognizes the power of sexual desire and holds both men and women responsible for upholding modesty in society. They are both to stay away from any act that could open the way to such sexual relations, whether in manner, attire or speech. The Quran explains: “Say to the believing men that they should lower their gaze and guard their modesty; that will make for greater purity for them; and Allah is well-acquainted with all that they do. And say to the believing women that they should lower their gaze and guard their modesty; and that they should not display their beauty except to their husbands…” (Quran 24:30-31).

The word Muslim means one who submits their will to the Will of God. Obedience to God and seeking His pleasure are, therefore, foremost in how Muslims should lead their lives. Guarding one’s chastity is considered one of the noblest characteristics of a believer. “For men and women who guard their chastity, and for men and women who engage much in God’s praise, for them has God prepared a reward” (Quran 24:30-31).

THE PROCESS OF MARRIAGE

While the concept of dating does not exist in Islam, the need to determine compatibility between future spouses is recognized. For instance, when marrying their eldest daughter, Sarah, the Siddiqis made sure she and her suitor were given an opportunity to get to know one another in a moderate social setting before either side made a commitment. Once they were engaged, the two continued a dialogue via phone and email.

Spouses are selected in different ways. Some marriages, like Sarah’s, are formally arranged (Quran 4:36). Other individuals find their own partners through interaction with each other, as in the case of Muhammad Uthman and his wife, Eman, who met on campus and took a liking for one another. Through it all, another element that is pivotal in marriage is the role of marriage, its purpose and its impact on society.

HOOMOSEXUALITY

Homosexual acts are prohibited in Islam, as in several other non-Abrahamic religions. Many of the great Prophets such as Abraham, David, Solomon and Muhammad are known to have had only one wife. Islam does not recognize polygamy, it permitted to perform the practice, limiting it to a maximum of 4 wives, but only under conditions where each wife is treated justly and with equality. Islam recognizes the legitimacy of polygamy, especially when considering a variety of factors, such as a higher ratio of women in certain countries, the toll of war and excessive male deaths in a society. Polygamy provides a respectful status to each wife, who has full equal rights within the marriage. In contrast, adultery, which has become a widespread practice in today’s society, is generally considered a hidden, shameful practice where the mistress holds a second-class status without recognition and legal protection.

The Prophet Muhammad was married to a single woman, Khadija, for the majority of his married life, from the age of 25 until approximately the age of 50. This practice of monogamy is by far the overwhelming norm amongst Muslims today with most Muslims having only one wife. It was after Khadija’s death, that the Prophet married other women. Many of these marriages were either to widows or carried out with the intent of peacefully uniting tribes, nations or families.

POLYGAMY

Polygamy has been practiced within the Abrahamic and non-Abrahamic religions. Many of the great Prophets such as Abraham, David, Solomon and Muhammad are known to have had more than one wife. Islam does not recognize the legitimacy of polygamy, it permitted to perform the practice, limiting it to a maximum of 4 wives, but only under conditions where each wife is treated justly and with equality. Islam recognizes the legitimacy of polygamy, especially when considering a variety of factors, such as a higher ratio of women in certain countries, the toll of war and excessive male deaths in a society. Polygamy provides a respectful status to each wife, who has full equal rights within the marriage. In contrast, adultery, which has become a widespread practice in today’s society, is generally considered a hidden, shameful practice where the mistress holds a second-class status without recognition and legal protection.

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EXTENDED FAMILY

Islam stresses the significance of safeguarding the ties of the extended family, and calls it “an institution that the Prophet Muhammad placed in the hands of the people of the Book” (Quran 17:26). “Husband and wife join none with Him in worship, and do good to parents, kin,folk…” (Quran 4:36). Similarly, Prophet Muhammad instructed, “Whoever believes in Allah and the Last Day should maintain good relations with his kinfolk.”

Even as Muslim couples embark on their lives together, maintaining strong ties with their extended families is an important aspect of their lifestyles. Some couples live in a joint family system, others prefer to live as nuclear families and define their own family. “The family is the pillar of Islam, a great distance away depending on job locations, chosen community, or preference of state. Nonetheless, frequent family reunions, particularly during summer holidays or weddings, are common.”

Note: The superscript “p” next to Prophet Muhammad represents the incorrect Muslim way of saying his name. May God’s peace and blessings be upon him.

The families profiled in this article are fictionalized; however, their life stories, accounts, in spirit, can easily be applicable to a wide variety of American Muslim families.