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# SUSTAINING THE ISLAMIC MARRIAGE INSTITUTION IN MALAYSIA: LESSONS FROM QUR'ĀNIC STORIES

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## **Abstract**

*Divorce rates are rising in Malaysia and as a consequence, the sacred Islamic marriage institution is directly affected by this phenomenon. It was reported that the number of divorces in 2010 was 28,035 and it increased rapidly to 48,077 as of July 2016. JAKIM has identified ten major causes of divorce in Malaysia which are: irresponsibility, weak Islamic foundation, third party interference, cultural differences, sexual issues, financial crisis, career dilemma, health problems, moral decay and communication obstacles. The Quran contains several narratives on marital relationship, which can serve as examples for married couples. This study critically investigates to what extent these Qur'ānic references may guide a married couple's better understanding of their roles and duties as husband and wife, thus significantly enhancing their quality of marriage. The research proves that marital life is an arena for jihad, which means married couples must strive and make their utmost effort to strengthen their marriage. Virtues such as humility, patience and honesty are prime qualities in a marriage, whereas vices such as irresponsibility, arrogance and infidelity are detriments. The research highlights solutions for almost every cause of divorce as identified by JAKIM, which expects to reduce the divorce rate and sustain the Islamic marriage institution in Malaysia. Finally, it is recommended that JAKIM should consider including the research findings in its post-marital course as it is one of the best platforms to propagate the Qur'ānic stories of husbands and wives to Muslim married couples in Malaysia.*

**Keywords:** divorce, marriage, Qur'ānic stories, JAKIM

## Introduction

Jabatan Kemajuan Islam Malaysia (JAKIM) or the Department of Islamic Development Malaysia is the main federal agency that administers the Islamic institution of marriage in Malaysia. One of JAKIM's methods to consolidate the marriage institution is through Islamic education, specifically the compulsory attendance of a pre-marital course, which is a prerequisite for any Muslim couple intending to marry. Despite this mandatory procedure the Islamic institution of marriage still faces serious problems. It was reported that the number of divorces in 2010 was 28,035 and it increased rapidly to 48,077 as of July 2016.<sup>1</sup> JAKIM has identified ten major marital problems that compromise the Islamic institution of marriage in Malaysia: (1) irresponsibility; (2) weak Islamic foundation; (3) third party interference; (4) cultural differences; (5) sexual issues; (6) financial crisis; (7) career dilemma; (8) health problems; (9) moral decay; and (10) communication obstacles.<sup>2</sup> Resulting from these findings, JAKIM introduced the post-marital courses in 2015, comprising of four modules, as an initiative to curb the above marital problems.

Although JAKIM's post-marital courses include many evidences from the Qur'ān, it lacked Qur'ānic stories about husbands and wives. These stories may help troubled married couples to relate to the issues discussed and encourage them to emulate the ways of blessed couples, whilst avoiding the fate of the cursed couples described in the Quran.<sup>3</sup> There are twelve stories discussed in this

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<sup>1</sup> Bernama, "48,077 Pasangan Islam Bercerai Tahun Ini," *Utusan Online*, November 14, 2016, <http://m.utusan.com.my/berita/parlimen/48-077-pasangan-islam-bercerai-tahun-ini-1.407505>.

<sup>2</sup> Hakimi Ismail, "92687 Pasangan Daftarkan Penceraian," *Utusan Online*, March 4, 2016, <http://m.utusan.com.my/berita/nasional/92-678-pasangan-daftarkan-penceraian-1.196883>

<sup>3</sup> Muḥammad ibn Jarīr Al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' Al-Bayān 'An Ta'wīlĀy Al-Qur'ān* (Beirut: Muassasah Al-Risālah, 1994), 1: 77.

paper which are: (1) Ādam and his wife; (2) Nūḥ and his wife; (3) Ibrāhīm and his wife; (4) Lūṭ and his wife; (5) the Egyptian mayor and his wife; (6) the Pharaoh and his wife; (7) Mūsā and his wife; (8) Zakariyyā and his wife; (9) AbūLahab and his wife; (10) Muḥammad (pbuh) and his wives; (11) Khawlah (al-Mujādilah) and her husband; and (12) an ungrateful married couple.

As the Qur'ānic stories reveal the timeless realities that portray actual issues<sup>4</sup>, this paper will focus more on the lessons and messages without going into the differences of opinion among scholars, or details of names and places. The Qur'ānic translations in this paper are based on the *TafsīrAr-Raḥmān: Interpretation of the Meaning of the Qur'ān* by Abdullah Basmeih, a collaborative output between JAKIM and the Malaysian National Institute of Translation (ITNMB).<sup>5</sup>

### **Ādam and His Wife**

The marriage lessons derived from the three *suwar* that mention Ādam and his wife are: *al-Baqarah* (2: 30-39) in ten *āyāt*; *al-A'rāf* (7: 11-25) in fifteen *āyāt*; and *Ṭāhā* (20: 115-127) in thirteen *āyāt*. All the narratives in the three *suwar* served a unique purpose and are narrated in their own specific styles, according to their respective contexts and messages.<sup>6</sup>

The focus of the narrative in *al-Baqarah* is the appointment of humankind as vicegerents on earth.<sup>7</sup> A vicegerent is a person assigned by Allah to manage and govern life on earth based on His guidance with the objective of gaining His pleasure.<sup>8</sup> A vicegerent who disbelieves in Allah, or commits idolatry and follows his own desires would be committing an act of rebellion and betrayal.<sup>9</sup> The

<sup>4</sup> 'Abd Al-Karīm Al-Khaṭīb, *Al-Qaṣaṣ Al-Qur'ānīfiManṭūqihīwaMaḥḥūmihi* (Beirut: Dār al-Ma'rifah, 1975), 38.

<sup>5</sup> Abdullah Basmeih, *TafsīrAr-Raḥmān: Interpretation of the Meaning of the Qur'ān* (Putrajaya: Department of Islamic Development Malaysia (JAKIM), 2014), 1316.

<sup>6</sup> Israr Ahmad Khan, *Qur'ānic Studies: An Introduction* (Kuala Lumpur: Zaman Islam Media, 2000), 241.

<sup>7</sup> SayyidQuṭb, *FīZīlāl Al-Qur'ān* (Beirut: Dār al-Shurūq, 2003), 1: 56.

<sup>8</sup> Abdullah Basmeih, *TafsīrAr-Raḥmān*, 13-14.

<sup>9</sup> AbulA'laMawdudi, *Towards Understanding the Qur'ān*, trans. Zafar Ishaq Ansari (Markfield, Leicestershire: The Islamic Foundation, 1988), 1: 60.

lessons that may contribute towards a better understanding between husbands and wives of their roles are: (1) human beings who choose to disobey Allah will create chaos, including marital breakdown; (2) knowledge is paramount in being successful vicegerents as well as ideal husbands and wives; (3) to be created as human beings with free will is a great privilege because all other creations of Allah including angels, serve humankind. This privilege however comes with great responsibility; (4) repentance is vital as humans are prone to committing mistakes; (5) Allah will always accept sincere repentance as He is the Most Forgiving and the Most Merciful; and (6) by following Allah's guidance, human beings need not fear for their future in the Hereafter and should not despair what is lost from this world.<sup>10</sup>

The focus of the narrative in *al-A'rāf* is Satan's endless enmity towards humankind from the beginning of creation.<sup>11</sup> It is crucial for husbands and wives to recognise Satan as their enemy and to avoid his temptations which can be manifested in the following ways: (1) arrogance and superiority complex, e.g. when Iblīs considered himself superior to Ādam and willingly succumbed to evil;<sup>12</sup> (2) blame shifting attitude, e.g. when Iblīs blamed Allah for his estrangement;<sup>13</sup> (3) obsession over worldly pursuits more than the Hereafter, e.g. when Iblīs requested for respite to exercise his evil dominion and gain followers without concern for the Hereafter or his place in Hell; (4) ingratitude, as seen in Iblīs' endless strive to embed the same ungrateful attitude in human beings; (5) the endless trickeries of Satan to lead human beings astray;<sup>14</sup> and (6) immodesty, as Satan would tempt human beings to turn away from modesty and humility.<sup>15</sup>

The focus of the narrative in *Ṭāhā* is the nature of human weakness and Allah's mercy on His chosen servants.<sup>16</sup>

<sup>10</sup> Ismā'īl ibn 'Umar ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr Al-Qur'ān Al-'Aẓīm* (Beirut: Dār Ibn Ḥazm, 2000), 121.

<sup>11</sup> Quṭb, *FīZilāl Al-Qur'ān*, 3: 1247.

<sup>12</sup> Mawdudī, *Understanding the Qur'ān*, 3: 14.

<sup>13</sup> Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr Al-Qur'ān Al-'Aẓīm*, 747.

<sup>14</sup> Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr Al-Qur'ān Al-'Aẓīm*, 748.

<sup>15</sup> Mawdudī, *Understanding the Qur'ān*, 3: 16.

<sup>16</sup> Quṭb, *FīZilāl Al-Qur'ān*, 4: 2326.



Forgetfulness, lack of willpower, hunger, nakedness, thirst, and the sun's heat are among the human weaknesses mentioned. From this story, it is essential for husbands and wives to realise that: (1) frequent reminders strengthen willpower, including the willpower to have a successful marriage;<sup>17</sup> (2) human beings learn best through experience; (3) Allah's promises are true while Satan's promises are false; (4) Allah's mercy, forgiveness and guidance must constantly be prayed for; and (5) those who follow Allah's guidance will neither find themselves astray in this world nor grieve in the Hereafter.<sup>18</sup>

Although these three *suwar* narrate in specific styles with different contexts, some similarities are found as follows: (1) humankind has a unique responsibility as Allah's vicegerents on earth; (2) all the angels obeyed Allah's order to prostrate before Ādam except Iblīs; (3) Allah permitted Ādam and his wife to enjoy all the bounties of Paradise with the exception of one forbidden tree; (4) Satan, as the symbol of evil, succeeded in seducing Ādam and his wife to eat from the forbidden tree; (5) Allah accepted Ādam's and his wife's repentance; (6) Allah sent Ādam, his wife and Satan to earth and reminded them of the benefits of following His guidance and the consequences of rejecting it.

The repetition of these six facts in all three *suwar* proves that it is crucial for husbands and wives to be constantly reminded of: (1) the purpose of their existence in this world, which is to serve Allah by following His guidance; (2) Satan as the enemy of humankind; (3) life being a test; (4) seeking Allah's help against Satan's trickeries; (5) constantly seeking repentance regardless of the magnitude of the sin; (6) Allah's acceptance of Ādam's and his wife's repentance, and honouring Ādam with prophethood; (7) the earth's creation not as a place of punishment for humans, but as a fulfillment of their intended existence;<sup>19</sup> (8) women are not the root of all evil, as the Qur'ān never blamed Ādam's wife for their fall; and (9) the importance of following Allah's guidance.

Based on the story of Ādam and his wife, the quality of married life could be enhanced by recognising the following:

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<sup>17</sup> Mawdudi, *Understanding the Qur'ān*, 5: 231.

<sup>18</sup> Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr Al-Qur'ān Al-'Azīm*, 1228.

<sup>19</sup> Mawdudi, *Understanding the Qur'ān*, 1: 66 & 3: 15.

### **(i) The Dangers of Pessimism and the Importance of Optimism**

Perceiving life on earth as Allah's punishment constitutes a pessimistic worldview. The first married couple, Ādam and his wife, were punished by Allah with expulsion from Paradise and descent to earth for consuming the forbidden fruit. Perceiving worldly life as a form of Allah's punishment that humans must endure is thus a pessimistic mentality entirely rejected by Islam.<sup>20</sup>

Life is in fact a gift to be appreciated (7: 10; 23: 78; 32: 9; 67: 23). The order to descend from Paradise to earth is not a punishment but a realization of the purpose of human creation (2: 30; 51: 56). Paradise could never be the ideal place for humans to achieve their purpose as Allah's servants and vicegerents. Essentially, it is outside Paradise that the realisation of human creation could be cultivated<sup>21</sup> and earth provides the ideal environment to nurture inner qualities such as patience, gratitude and courage.

This gift of life comprises a lifelong series of tests. The Qur'ān reminds humankind about the tests in this worldly life and promises priceless rewards for those who succeed. To be successful, humans must be proactive in this world by engaging in problem solving based on Allah's guidance (2: 38). They must not let themselves and others continuously suffer, and this life should challenge them to draw out their best deeds and efforts (67: 2).

The question then arises about the purpose and justification behind the forbidden tree, and the ordeal that Ādam and his wife endured when Allah could have easily placed them on earth. The answer is that it was part of their trial which proved to be necessary in order to strengthen their will and highlight their weakness. This enabled them to see for themselves the consequences of their action and bear the responsibilities.<sup>22</sup>

The ability to follow guidance, control desires and repent are the qualities that distinguish humans from animals. The forbidden fruit, Satan's deception, the couple's error and their plea for Allah's

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<sup>20</sup> Mawdudi, *Understanding the Qur'ān*, 1: 66.

<sup>21</sup> Quṭb, *Fī Zīlāl Al-Qur'ān*, 1: 60 and Mawdudi, *Understanding the Qur'ān*, 3: 15.

<sup>22</sup> Mawdudi, *Understanding the Qur'ān*, 1: 64.

forgiveness and mercy encapsulates the ever-recurring life cycle of humans on earth.<sup>23</sup>

This optimistic view of life liberates humankind from the burdens of the original sin which is central to Christianity. The Islamic perspective is easy and simple: Ādam lapsed and disobeyed Allah (20: 121), but immediately repented and prayed for His forgiveness and mercy. Allah accepted his repentance, forgave him and honoured him with prophethood (20: 122). Allah has not made the original sin a curse for human beings because there is no inherited sin (6: 164, 17: 15, 35: 18, 39: 7; 53: 38). Repentance in Islam eases the mind and heart, motivates success, and removes despair.<sup>24</sup>

### **(ii)The Dangers of Arrogance and the Importance of Humility**

Iblīs was arrogant and considered himself superior to Ādam. He refused to repent to Allah but instead, chose to go astray and blamed Allah for his estrangement (7: 12-16).

In contrast, humility is considered the major virtue that led Ādam and his wife to descend to earth as Allah's vicegerents. It was only after they sinned and humbly repented that Allah announced their departure from Paradise and descent to earth (2: 36-38; 7: 23-24). Ādam and his wife could have chosen to shift the blame onto Satan for their mistake, but they instead accepted full responsibility and only blamed themselves (7: 23).

The story of Ādam and his wife provides solutions for three major marital problems which are irresponsibility, moral decay and third party interference.

Irresponsibility was displayed by Iblīs when he refused to obey Allah's order and blamed Allah for his evil path. This is in contrast with Ādam and his wife who accepted full responsibility for their mistake instead of blaming Satan.

In order to solve marital problems resulting from irresponsibility, married couples must recognise the following: (1) irresponsibility is a trait of Iblīs that he intends to instil in the children of Ādam so they may become dwellers of Hell; (2) one of

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<sup>23</sup> Qutb, *Fī Zilāl Al-Qur'ān*, 1: 61.

<sup>24</sup> Mawdudi, *Understanding the Qur'ān*, 1: 65-66.

the signs of irresponsibility is to blame others; (3) married couples must be responsible and focus on duties rather than rights; (4) refusing blame shifting is a way to better oneself as a human being, as it is easier to change what can be controlled (the self) rather than what is uncontrollable (other human beings or situations); and (5) irresponsibility would not only negatively impact married couples but could also trigger psychosocial stress in their children.<sup>25</sup>

For marital problems caused by moral decay, it is important to realise that arrogance is fatal to human beings. Arrogance leads to further moral decay such as envy, egocentrism and greed. Arrogance also prevents human beings from recognising and admitting their mistakes by encouraging a superiority complex and blaming others for their own shortcomings. Arrogance is Iblīs manifest in Allah's creation. Married couples must thus avoid exhibiting the traits of Iblīs such as: (1) superiority complex (believing that one is better and more deserving than the other); (2) belittling one's spouse; (3) envy, egocentrism and greed; (4) denial of mistakes; (5) refusing to seek forgiveness; and (6) rejecting good advice.

Satan's interference is undeniably the most dangerous challenge to overcome in pursuit of Allah's path. Satan always endeavours to separate married spouses, instigate fights between them and persuade them to disobey Allah. It is vital for married couples to remember that Satan is their enemy, to constantly seek Allah's protection from Satan and to continuously and immediately repent to Allah if they fall victim to Satan.

### **Nūḥ and His Wife**

The story of Nūḥ and his wife is mentioned only once in *al-Tahrīm* (66: 10), when Allah exemplifies disbelievers by mentioning the wives of Nūḥ and Lūṭ. Even though they were the wives of two of Allah's righteous servants, they betrayed their husbands by rejecting their faith in Allah. Ultimately, Nūḥ and Lūṭ were unable to save their respective wives from Allah's punishment.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Paula Sheppard, Kristin Snopkowski and Rebecca Sear, "Father Absence and Reproduction-Related Outcomes in Malaysia, a Transitional Fertility Population," *Human Nature*, vol. 25, (2014): 230, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12110-014-9195-2>

<sup>26</sup> Abdullah Basmeih, *Tafsir Ar-Rahman*, 1137.

The fate of Nūḥ's wife is intended to warn disbelievers,<sup>27</sup> as she was blessed with a pious and righteous husband but chose to disbelieve, betray and discredit him by telling others that he was insane and even joined other disbelievers in mocking him.<sup>28</sup> Her pious husband could not save her from Allah's punishment and she was doomed to Hell with the other disbelievers.<sup>29</sup> It is imperative for husbands and wives to accept personal responsibility for their own choices and actions, as being married to a pious spouse will not guarantee entrance to Paradise.

The story of Nūḥ and his wife provides solutions for four major marital problems which are irresponsibility, moral decay, third party interference and communication obstacles.

Nūḥ's wife demonstrated irresponsibility when she disobeyed Allah and her husband. Although she was irresponsible, Nūḥ remained patient with her. To avoid marital problems caused by irresponsibility, married couples must realise that it is their individual responsibility to strive to become a responsible and ideal spouse. Those who achieve responsibility are emulating Nūḥ as dwellers of Paradise, while those who fail are emulating Nūḥ's wife as dwellers of Hell.

Moral decay, such as ingratitude and betrayal, were also manifested by Nūḥ's wife when she betrayed her husband and sided with his enemies who disbelieved in both Allah and him. Married couples must recognise that: (1) women's success should never be defined by their husbands; (2) betrayal is detrimental to marriage; and (3) gratitude and appreciation are vanguards for marriage.

Third party interference came from the society who disbelieved and mocked Nūḥ. His wife may have been influenced by the society into mocking her own husband and disbelieving his message. Communication obstacles, such as mocking and ridiculing one's spouse, were portrayed by Nūḥ's wife when she alleged that Nūḥ was insane. Amazingly, Nūḥ neither divorced his wife nor married other women but remained patient with her.

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<sup>27</sup> Muḥammad ibn al-Ṭāhir ibn 'Āshūr, *Tafsīr Al-Taḥrīrwa Al-Tanwīr* (Tunis: Dār al-Tūnisīyah, 1984). 28: 374.

<sup>28</sup> Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr Al-Qur'ān Al-'Aẓīm*, 1896.

<sup>29</sup> Qutb, *Fī Zilāl Al-Qur'ān*, 6: 3621.

Married couples should always remember that those who are easily swayed by third party interference to betray and mock their own spouses are paving the path to Hell. The fate of Nūḥ's wife also awaits those who fail to repent to Allah.

### **Ibrāhīm and His Wife**

The story of Ibrāhīm and his wife is mentioned twice in the Qur'ān, in *Hūd* (11: 69-73) and *al-Dhāriyāt* (51: 24-30) respectively. Both *sūrah* talk about the coming of unknown guests (who were angels in human disguise) to the house of Ibrāhīm, the glad tidings of a son, and his wife's response to them.

The arrival of the unknown guests with a peace greeting was welcomed by Ibrāhīm's warm greeting.<sup>30</sup> He and his wife had prepared a roasted calf for them which was the best dish they could afford. By greeting and hosting their unknown guests with warmth, the married couple clearly exhibited generosity in their hospitable interaction with their guests.

The glad tidings of a son to the married couple caused Ibrāhīm's wife to be surprised. This indicated that: (1) emotional responses such as shrieking and slapping one's face is natural when surprised,<sup>31</sup> (2) a wife has the right to speak in front of male guests; and (3) it is permissible for a wife to join her husband and male guests, as well as to partake of meals with them.<sup>32</sup>

The story of Ibrāhīm and his wife provides solutions for four major marital problems which are irresponsibility, moral decay, health problems and communication obstacles.

Irresponsibility in marriage could be diminished by following the responsible behaviour of Ibrāhīm and his wife who welcomed the unknown guests and helped each other to serve them food. Married couples must recognise that: (1) irresponsibility could create disharmony; (2) a married couple should always help one another, (3) no spouse should assume a commanding role; and (4) every spouse must exert his or her effort towards creating a harmonious marriage.

Due to increased financial burden, Malaysian husbands

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<sup>30</sup> Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr Al-Qur'ān Al-'Aẓīm*, 960.

<sup>31</sup> Quṭb, *Fī Zīlāl Al-Qur'ān*, 4: 1912 and 6: 3383.

<sup>32</sup> Ibn 'Ashūr, *Al-Taḥrīr wa Al-Tanwīr*, 26: 360.

nowadays increasingly prefer their wives to earn an income through professional employment. Despite being professional employees, women are still the primary caregivers of their children as well as household managers.<sup>33</sup> They expect their husbands' participation in performing certain domestic chores such as caring for the children, and become stressed when their husbands are uncooperative.<sup>34</sup>

Generosity and respect are among the virtues and high moral values portrayed by Ibrāhīm and his wife in the way they treated one another and their warm hospitality towards their unknown guests. Ibrāhīm gave his wife the freedom to speak out in front of the male guests and did not become angry when she laughed and reacted in surprise to the good news. Ibrāhīm's wife also respected his decision to receive the unknown guests without showing annoyance. Among the lessons that could be applied in married life are generosity especially to those who are inside the home, as well as humility and respect for one another.

Health problems such as infertility and old age were mentioned openly by Ibrāhīm's wife in front of the unknown guests. This shows that they were unashamed of this reality and accepted it sincerely. Married couples who face similar problems should realise that such realities are a test from Allah and He knows what is ideal for His servants. Therefore, gratitude to Allah and His blessings is a virtue. Amazingly, long before the wife knew that she was barren, she had permitted Ibrāhīm to take Hājar (her Egyptian maid servant) as his second wife. Hājar gave birth to Ismā'īl in Palestine before she was transferred to Mecca upon Allah's command.<sup>35</sup>

The communication skills portrayed by Ibrāhīm and his wife are exemplary, particularly when Ibrāhīm answered his guests' peaceful greetings despite not knowing them. Ibrāhīm's wife also conveyed her astonishment of the unexpected news in an appropriate

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<sup>33</sup> Noraini M Noor, "Roles and Women's Well-Being: Some Preliminary Findings from Malaysia", *Sex Roles*, vol. 41, no. 3/4 (August 1999): 131, <https://doi.org/10.1023/A:1018846010541>.

<sup>34</sup> Kalthom Abdullah, Noraini M. Noor and Saodah Wok, "The Perceptions of Women's Roles and Progress: A Study of Malay Women," *Social Indicator Research*, vol. 89, (2008): 453, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11205-008-9242-7>

<sup>35</sup> 'Umar Sulaymān 'Abd Allāh al-Ashqar, *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Qaṣaṣ al-Nabawī*, ('Ammān: Dār al-Nafā'is, 1997), 35.

manner and by stating their elderly condition. She displayed a good example of communication skills as she first stated her own weakness before mentioning her husband's elderly condition. Ibrāhīm did not interrupt and instead, attentively listened to her as well as his guests. Married couples should practise the above excellent communication skills such as being a patient listener, not interrupting when a spouse is speaking, stating one's own weakness before that of their spouse, and conveying sincere feelings in a good manner.

### **Lūṭ and His Wife**

The story of Lūṭ and his wife is mentioned eight times in the Qur'ān: *al-A'rāf* (7: 80-84), *Hūd* (11: 69-83), *al-Ḥijr* (15: 51-77), *al-Shu'arā'* (26: 160-175), *al-Naml* (27: 54-58), *al-'Ankabūt* (29: 26-35), *al-Ṣaffāt* (37: 133-136), and *al-Tahrīm* (66: 10).

In *Hūd*, *al-Ḥijr*, and *al-'Ankabūt*, the story of Lūṭ and his wife is connected with that of Ibrāhīm and his wife. The angels first came to Ibrāhīm's house bearing good news of his descendants and also news of the destruction of Lūṭ's people. In *al-A'rāf* (7: 80-84), *al-Shu'arā'* (26: 160-175), *al-Naml* (27: 54-58), and *al-Ṣaffāt* (37: 133-136), Lūṭ's story was described without association with Ibrāhīm's story. In *al-Shu'arā'* (26: 171) and *al-Ṣaffāt* (37: 135), Lūṭ's wife was described as an elderly and matured woman who refused to believe in her husband. Instead she accepted and even encouraged the sinful acts of the society.<sup>36</sup>

The people of Lūṭ's nation were the first to practice homosexuality in a public manner. When the angels went to Lūṭ's house disguised as handsome men, Lūṭ's people rushed towards his house after learning of the guests from his wife.<sup>37</sup> Immorality was widespread among Lūṭ's people who were renowned not only for moral degradation and perversity that included gratifying sexual desire by sodomy, but also robbed travellers and openly committed

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<sup>36</sup> Abdul Malik bin Dr.Syekh Haji Abdul Karim Amrullah, *Tafsir al-Azhar* (Singapura: Pustaka Nasional, 1990), 19: 5155.

<sup>37</sup> Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr Al-Qur'ān Al-'Azīm*, 963.



evil. They were compared to worms that flourished only on filth and found all that is clean to be disgusting.<sup>38</sup>

In *al-Taḥrīm* (66: 10), the story of Lūṭ's wife is connected with Nūḥ's wife as both were examples of disbelievers who betrayed their pious husbands by rejecting Allah's messages and choosing to side with their husbands' enemies instead.

The story of Lūṭ and his wife provides solutions for four major marital problems which are irresponsibility, moral decay, sexual issues and third party interference.

Irresponsibility, moral decay and sexual issues were portrayed by Lūṭ's wife and her society. She had rejected Allah and her husband in favour of the society and their preference for homosexuality, which she also encouraged by informing people about their handsome guests.<sup>39</sup> She was ultimately destroyed together with other disbelievers. Her misfortune was mentioned eight times in the Qur'ān together with Nūḥ's wife as dwellers of Hell.

Third party interference came from the society who disbelieved in Allah and His messenger, and committed evil practices. Lūṭ's wife may have been influenced by them which led to her disbelief in her husband's message and her approval of society's evil practices.

Married couples must understand the dreadful consequences of betrayal, irresponsibility, moral decay, negative third party influences and sexual deviancy all of which were committed by dwellers of Hell. Married couples should be reminded to reject the various forms of sexual immorality, which include pornography, adultery, paedophilia, incest and LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender) practices.

### **The Egyptian Mayor<sup>40</sup> and His Wife**

The story of the Egyptian Mayor and his wife is mentioned in *Sūrah Yūsuf* (12: 21-35; 50-53). The Qur'ānic narrative begins with

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<sup>38</sup> Mawdudi, *Understanding the Qur'ān*, 4: 123, 299.

<sup>39</sup> Ibn Kathīr, *Al-Qur'ān Al-'Azīm*, 963.

<sup>40</sup> The original Qur'ānic word is '*Al-'Azīz*' and its actual meaning remains unclear. Some scholars agree that it means '*Al-Wazīr*' (the Minister). For clarity purposes, '*Al-'Azīz*' may refer to the Mayor or the administrator for a particular city.

the Mayor's conversation with his wife after purchasing Yūsuf. His statement indicates that he loved Yūsuf dearly and treated him like his own son.<sup>41</sup>

It appears that the Mayor's wife became infatuated with Yūsuf's physical attractiveness.<sup>42</sup> It may have been cultivated long before the incident of her locking the door and seducing him when her lust became uncontrollable.<sup>43</sup> Under Allah's protection, Yūsuf successfully rejected her seduction and reminded her of Allah as well as His limits. Yūsuf is an example of a pious person who resisted temptation and turned to Allah for help and support.<sup>44</sup>

The manner in which the Mayor's wife chased Yūsuf towards the door and tore his shirt from behind showed the extent to which one can be blinded by lust. When the Mayor's wife found her husband at the door she abruptly lied about the incident and tried to implicate Yūsuf. Yūsuf's defence signified the importance of courage when facing false accusation. The testimony of the household member who spoke in Yūsuf's defence, signifies the importance of including a witness when resolving marital conflict.<sup>45</sup>

Upon realising that the shirt was torn from behind, the Mayor knew that it was his wife who seduced Yūsuf. He neither harmed nor divorced his wife even though there were grounds to do so. He simply requested Yūsuf to forget the incident and told his wife to seek forgiveness for her sin. The Mayor understood that it was natural for women to be seduced by beauty and he wanted this incident resolved amicably.<sup>46</sup> The important lessons learnt from this narrative are that forgiveness is the ideal solution in marital dispute, and a husband should be mindful of situations that may jeopardise his marriage.

Due to the malignant gossip spread by women in the city, the Mayor's wife arranged for a feast in her palace. When she succeeded in proving the hypnotic effect of Yūsuf's physical attractiveness to

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<sup>41</sup> Quṭb, *Fī Zilāl Al-Qur'ān*, 4: 1979.

<sup>42</sup> Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr Al-Qur'ān Al-'Azīm*, 980.

<sup>43</sup> Quṭb, *Fī Zilāl Al-Qur'ān*, 4: 1980.

<sup>44</sup> Quṭb, *Fī Zilāl Al-Qur'ān*, 4: 1981.

<sup>45</sup> Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr Al-Qur'ān Al-'Azīm*, 981.

<sup>46</sup> Ibn 'Ashūr, *Al-Taḥrīr wa Al-Tanwīr*, 12: 258.

her guests, she publicly threatened him with imprisonment.<sup>47</sup> Allah answered Yūsuf's invocation and the latter became a prisoner for a long period of time.

Following this long period, Allah freed Yūsuf from prison through an ideal situation; he interpreted an unusual dream of the King of Egypt. When the King granted Yūsuf's freedom from his sentence, Yūsuf requested for an enquiry to prove his innocence. The guests at the feast testified to his innocence, and the Mayor's wife openly confessed her mistake and declared Yūsuf to be a truthful person. She also wanted her husband to know that she had never committed adultery in his absence. She further stated that she was not exempt from evil and believed that Allah is Most Forgiving and Most Merciful. Her confession gracefully ended the story of the Mayor and his wife.<sup>48</sup>

The story of the Egyptian Mayor and his wife provides solutions for five major marital problems which are irresponsibility, moral decay, sexual issues, third party interference and career dilemma.

Irresponsibility in this story was portrayed by the Mayor's wife who tried to seduce Yūsuf while her husband was away. Married couples must realise that irresponsibility destroys marriage stability and harmony, and following one's lustful desires is poisonous to a marriage.

Moral decay, such as arrogance and lack of shame, was shown by the Mayor's wife who was blinded by her lust. She publicly divulged her lust for Yūsuf at the feast. It is vital for married couples to work together and preserve the sanctity of marriage in each of its dimensions - internal and external as well as individual and societal. Internal struggle represents the struggle to control one's personal desires and responses. This may include for example, the desire to consume alcohol or illicit drugs, or the desire for sexual relations

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<sup>47</sup> Qutb, *Fī Zilāl Al-Qur'ān*, 4: 1984.

<sup>48</sup> There are two different opinions regarding the actual speaker of *āyah* 52 and 53; the confusion lies in whether they were uttered by Yūsuf or the Egyptian Mayor's wife. The researcher agrees with scholars such as Ibn Kathīr who believe they were uttered by the Egyptian Mayor's wife. (Refer: Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr Al-Qur'ān Al-'Azīm*, 986; Mawdudi, *Understanding the Qur'ān*, 4: 178-183 and Abdullah Basmeih, *Tafsir Ar-Rahman*, 408-409).

outside marriage. The successful struggle against one's internal desires signifies submission and devotion to Allah.<sup>49</sup>

Sexual issues are demonstrated by the Mayor's wife's lust for Yūsuf. Married couples must realise that spouses who are dissatisfied with their sexual relationship also have lower satisfaction in their marriage. According to research, the perception of sexual satisfaction and frequency of sexual intercourse are positively associated with marital satisfaction. Unfortunately, Malaysian women have reported sexual dissatisfaction more than men although the number of women coming forward to request for treatment is lower compared to men.<sup>50</sup>

Career dilemma may have preoccupied the Mayor to the extent of neglecting his wife's desires. However, it is significant to note that the wife eventually repented and admitted her mistake. She wanted her husband to know that she never pursued an extramarital affair with anyone in his absence. Her inability to control her lustful desires resulted in her failed attempt to seduce Yūsuf.

Although Yūsuf could be considered as the third party, he is not blameworthy as it was the Mayor's wife who initiated the seduction. This is relevant in the context of today's marital issues where husbands and wives face the problem of temptation. They should safeguard their personal dignity and emulate Yūsuf as an example of a responsible, truthful, persistent, brave and humble person. Qualities such as honesty, trustworthiness, self-discipline, courage, chastity and humility are crucial for all individuals regardless of marital status.

Those who face conflicts of betrayal and sexual harassment must also look to Yūsuf as an example of persistence in upholding justice, seeking Allah's help and maintaining hope in His mercy, while striving to free himself from an unwanted environment. Those

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<sup>49</sup> Sana Loue, "AIDS Jihad: Integrating the Islamic Concept of Jihad with HIV Prevention Theory," *Journal of Health Care for the Poor and Underserved*, no. 22 (2011): 726, <https://doi.org/10.1353/hpu.2011.0095>.

<sup>50</sup> Hatta Sidi, Sharifah Ezat Wan Puteh, Normi Abdullah, MarhaniMidin and BastamanBasuki, "The Prevalence of Female Sexual Dissatisfaction and the Dominant Risk Factors that may Impair Sexual Satisfaction in Malaysian Women," *Medical Journal of Indonesia*, vol. 16, no. 3, (July-September 2007): 187, 191, 192, <https://doi.org/10.13181/mji.v16i3.277>.

who sexually harass or are unfaithful must realise that Allah will never condone treachery.

The best solutions for those who realise their mistakes are repentance, seeking Allah's forgiveness as He is the Most Forgiving (*Ghafūr*) and Most Merciful (*Raḥīm*), and earnestly changing themselves for the better.

### **Pharaoh and His Wife**

The story of the Pharaoh and his wife is mentioned twice in the Qur'ān, in *al-Qaṣaṣ* (28: 8-9) and *al-Taḥrīm* (66: 11) respectively. In *al-Qaṣaṣ* (28: 8-9), the narrative begins when the household rescued a baby (Mūsā). The Pharaoh's wife showered the baby with love and hope using loving words. She wished to adopt him as her son, both as a comfort to her and for future benefits. Due to her persuasion, the Pharaoh spared the baby.<sup>51</sup> His wife's communication skills derived from her loving heart may have contributed to this. Due to her kindness, Allah realised her hope by giving her guidance through Mūsā and later rewarding her with Paradise.<sup>52</sup>

In *al-Taḥrīm* (66: 11), a beautiful prayer of the Pharaoh's wife is recorded. The prayer portrays a beautiful ending of her life in this world and serves as a model for all believers, especially wives.

The Pharaoh possessed the highest status and rule of his time but his wife was never affected by this. Although most women tend to be more sensitive and responsive to social pressure, she bravely confronted her husband and society by submitting to Allah refusing all temptations and overcoming all obstacles.<sup>53</sup>

The Pharaoh's wife was clearly distinguished from her husband's evil deeds, which she neither supported nor encouraged. She prayed that Allah would keep her away from the Pharaoh and his unjust nation.<sup>54</sup> Her prayer is an excellent example of hoping for Allah's gratification, and rejecting injustice and brutality.

The story of the Pharaoh and his wife provides solutions for five major marital problems which are irresponsibility, moral decay,

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<sup>51</sup> Quṭb, *Fī Zilāl Al-Qur'ān*, 5: 2679.

<sup>52</sup> Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr Al-Qur'ān Al-'Aẓīm*, 1410.

<sup>53</sup> Quṭb, *Fī Zilāl Al-Qur'ān*, 6: 3621.

<sup>54</sup> Quṭb, *Fī Zilāl Al-Qur'ān*, 6: 3621.

cultural differences, third party interference and communication obstacles.

Irresponsibility and moral decay in this story were represented by the Pharaoh who was a cruel king and disbelieved in Allah and His messenger. Married couples must recognise that: (1) injustice and brutality in marriage are well grounded reasons for a spouse to seek divorce; (2) one must be brave when fighting for justice even against a spouse; (3) unjust, cruel and abusive spouses and parents must never be tolerated.

Cultural differences are distinguished by the Pharaoh's culture of cruelty and hunger for power against his wife's culture of love and kindness. Such cultural differences can never reconcile and be harmonious. It is critical to note that when spouses identify their partners' negative traits as the source of their marital problems, more conflicts are expected to arise due to the difficulty of changing such traits.<sup>55</sup> Married couples must understand that cultural differences could complicate mutual understanding, especially if both spouses have significant differences in ideologies and assumptions about their marital relationship.<sup>56</sup>

Third party interference came in the form of the Pharaoh's advisors who were just as cruel as him. They supported his decision to kill all believers including his wife. Married couples must realise that: (1) third party interference that provokes violence must be reported to the authorities; (2) any kind of injustice must not be encouraged or supported; (3) authorities must be made aware of any form of domestic abuse for further action; and (4) victims should be provided with unwavering support.<sup>57</sup>

Good communication skills are manifested by the Pharaoh's wife who successfully persuaded him to adopt the rescued baby.

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<sup>55</sup> Zeynep Hamamci, "Dysfunctional Relationship Beliefs in Marital Conflict," *Journal of Rational-Emotive & Cognitive-Behavior Therapy*, vol. 23, no. 3, (Fall 2005): 247, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10942-005-0013-y>.

<sup>56</sup> Andrew Clarkwest, "Spousal Dissimilarity, Race, and Marital Dissolution," *Journal of Marriage and Family*, vol. 69, no. 3, (Aug 2007): 640, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1741-3737.2007.00397.x>.

<sup>57</sup> Noraini Md. Yusof and EsmaeilZeiny, "Educating the Silenced: Threads of Visual Culture in Domesticating the Wives in Malaysia," *International Education Studies*, vol. 8, no. 8, (2015): 49, <http://doi.org/10.5539/ies.v8n8p41>.

Married couples must realise the importance of learning and applying good communication skills in their daily life, especially with their own spouses. Good communication skills that come from a loving heart could resolve marital problems, whereas bad communication skills would lead to conflicts and arguments.<sup>58</sup>

### **Mūsā and His Wife**

The story of Mūsā and his wife is mentioned three times in the Qur'ān, in *Ṭāhā* (20: 9-13), *al-Naml* (27: 7-8), and *al-Qaṣaṣ* (28: 22-30) respectively.

In *Ṭāhā* and *al-Naml*, the story of Mūsā and his wife is brief. Mūsā and his family may have been travelling during a cold winter night through an unfamiliar area.<sup>59</sup> He told his wife and their children<sup>60</sup> that he had seen a fire, and would go there to seek news and bring a torch to warm themselves.<sup>61</sup>

In *al-Qaṣaṣ*, the story of Mūsā and his wife started before their meeting with Mūsā entering into an agreement with her father and their subsequent marriage. After fulfilling his agreement, he travelled with his wife to his home country. On the road between Madyan and Egypt, at Mount Sinai, he saw a fire. The same story is repeated in *Ṭāhā* and *al-Naml*.<sup>62</sup>

The story of Mūsā and his wife provides solutions for four major marital problems which are irresponsibility, moral decay, communication obstacles and third party interference.

Mūsā, his father-in-law, and the latter's two daughters were responsible, had high moral values and also good communication skills. Mūsā fulfilled his promise to work for his father-in-law who, in turn, promised to release Mūsā when his service term ended. They

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<sup>58</sup> Denise Haunani Solomon, Leanne K Knobloch and Mary Anne Fitzpatrick, "Relational Power, Marital Schema, and Decisions to Withhold Complaints: An Investigation of the Chilling Effect on Confrontation in Marriage," *Journal of Communication Studies*, vol. 55, no. 1 (Spring 2004): 148, <https://doi.org/10.1080/10510970409388610>.

<sup>59</sup> Mawduḍī, *Understanding the Qur'ān*, 7: 138.

<sup>60</sup> Ibn 'Āshūr, *Al-Taḥrīr wa Al-Tanwīr*, 16: 194.

<sup>61</sup> Quṭb, *Fī Zilāl Al-Qur'ān*, 4: 2330.

<sup>62</sup> Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr Al-Qur'ān Al-'Azīm*, 1415 and Quṭb, *Fī Zilāl Al-Qur'ān*, 5: 2689.

also communicated in the best manner, as proven in the dialogue recorded by Allah (28: 22-30). Married couples should realise the importance of a husband being the protector of the family, fulfilling promises accordingly and communicating using appropriate language.

The father could be considered as the third party who endeavoured to ensure his daughter married a good man. All of them managed to live together for ten years in harmony.<sup>63</sup> Although it is obvious that the father preferred Mūsā to serve him for ten years, he never imposed it. He merely said:

“I will give you one of these two daughters of mine in marriage if you stay for eight years in my service but you can stay for ten years if you wish it. But (remember) I do not mean to want to impose any hardship on you. Allah willing, you shall find me one of the righteous” (28: 27).<sup>64</sup>

This is an example of a parent-in-law who is responsible, kind, humble, honest and has good communication skills. The lesson learnt from this is third party, including in-laws, may play a role in enhancing the relationship of married couples.

### **Zakariyyā and His Wife**

The story of Zakariyyā and his wife is mentioned three times in the Qur’ān, in *Āli ‘Imrān* (3: 38-41), *Maryam* (19: 2-11), and *Al-Anbiyā’* (21: 89-90) respectively. All the *suwar* portrayed the invocation of Zakariyyā for a child, even though Zakariyyā was elderly and his wife was barren. Allah had answered his prayers.

The invocation recorded by Allah portrayed the humility of Zakariyyā in asking for a child. Zakariyyā described in detail his physical weakness to Allah such as his weakening bones and greying hair.<sup>65</sup> He also stated his hope of having a successor who would continue preaching the message as a prophet.<sup>66</sup>

<sup>63</sup> Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr Al-Qur’ān Al-‘Azīm*, 1415.

<sup>64</sup> Abdullah Basmeih, *Tafsīr Ar-Rahman*, 733.

<sup>65</sup> Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr Al-Qur’ān Al-‘Azīm*, 364.

<sup>66</sup> Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr Al-Qur’ān Al-‘Azīm*, 1179 and Quṭb, *Fī Zilāl Al-Qur’ān*, 4: 2302.



The invocation shows the importance of expressing one's hopes, worries and fears to Allah. Among the benefits of invocation are that it provides stress relief, it promotes optimism, and it builds deeper trust in Allah who will in turn provide comfort and peace of mind. In his invocation, Zakariyyā praised Allah and never insisted on anything. Allah also praised Zakariyyā and his wife for hastening good deeds and for praying wholeheartedly with hope, fear and humility.<sup>67</sup>

When Zakariyyā's invocation was answered, he was very surprised and requested for a specific sign of surety for this soon-to-be miraculous birth.<sup>68</sup> This exhibits humankind's inquisitive nature without contradicting belief in Allah.<sup>69</sup> Such an inquisitive trait could enhance and strengthen one's faith.

The story of Zakariyyā and his wife provides solutions for four major marital problems which are irresponsibility, moral decay, health problems and communication obstacles.

Zakariyyā and his wife were responsible and upheld high moral values. Although they were tested with childlessness, both of them especially Zakariyyā, were patient and never ceased praying to Allah for a child. They were active in performing good deeds, which prevented them from being passive and depressed. Married couples should recognise that: (1) Allah blesses the marriages of responsible, kind, humble and patient couples; (2) both spouses should work together and encourage one another to perform good deeds; and (3) irresponsibility, arrogance, blame shifting and impatience are perilous to marriage.

Health problems such as being elderly and barren should be handled in a calm and composed manner between spouses, as displayed by Zakariyyā in his prayers to Allah. Married couples must remember that prayers to Allah is necessary, in addition to making an effort to find solutions, Allah will provide the best bounties to patient and trusting believers.

Communication obstacles, such as publicly expressing emotions on social media platforms about one's marital conflicts are

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<sup>67</sup> Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr Al-Qur'ān Al-'Aẓīm*, 1250.

<sup>68</sup> Mawdudi, *Understanding the Qur'ān*, 1: 251 & 5: 147.

<sup>69</sup> Ibn 'Āshūr, *Al-Taḥrīr wa Al-Tanwīr*, 3: 242.

detrimental to marriage. This story is an excellent example of the appropriate manner of praying to Allah by humbly yet secretly communicating one's feelings to Him.<sup>70</sup> Married couples must recognise that: (1) only Allah can grant a married couples' wishes; (2) conveying feelings and thoughts on social media platforms can worsen marital conflicts, especially when a spouse receives ill advice in return; and (3) using blame shifting words can worsen such conflicts.<sup>71</sup>

Married couples should also practise and reflect on Zakariyyā's invocation to increase their own humility and hope for Allah's mercy. Zakariyyā's story is a motivation for married couples who are longing for a child as it encourages them to: (1) persistently and wholeheartedly pray to Allah with hope and fear; (2) remain humble during invocation; (3) convey their hopes and worries to Allah; and (4) to hasten performing good deeds.

The findings of the Qur'ānic story of Zakariyyā and his wife could benefit married couples in Malaysia, especially in highlighting the importance of patience. Although Zakariyyā could have married another woman to have children, he personally chose to remain in a monogamous marriage and continue praying. Today with the advancement of technology, married couples who opt to stay in monogamous marriage can seek fertility treatments in order to have their own biological children. Underprivileged Malaysian couples can request help from the Tunku Azizah Fertility Foundation (TAFF), which provides financial assistance to obtain fertility treatment in addition to counselling and support services.<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>70</sup> Abū Ḥafṣ 'Umar Ibn 'Ādil, *Tafsīr Al-Lubāb* (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah, n.d.), 13: 5.

<sup>71</sup> Els L D Heene, Ann Buysse and Paulette Van Oost, "Indirect Pathways between Depressive Symptoms and Marital Distress: The Role of Conflict Communication, Attributions and Attachment Style," *Journal of Family Process*, vol. 44, no. 4 (Dec 2005): 430, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1545-5300.2005.00070.x>.

<sup>72</sup> Ninety-four couples in the country who were once childless are currently parents to a total of 115 children. They are sincerely thankful to the Tunku Azizah Fertility Foundation (TAFF), especially its founder and patron, Tengku Puan Pahang Tunku Hajjah Azizah Maimunah Sultan Iskandar. She established the foundation on 11 August 2004 after she herself was unable to conceive for ten years before becoming a mother of six. (See Cecilia Sman, "TAFF a rare success story for all childless couples", *Borneo Post*, November 1, 2015, <http://www.theborneopost.com/2015/>

## Abū Lahab and His Wife

The story of Abū Lahab and his wife is mentioned in the entire chapter of *Sūrah al-Lahab* or *al-Masad*, (111: 1-5). Allah proclaimed the destruction of Abū Lahab and his punishment in Hell, from which neither his property nor his children can save him. His wife would also be punished in Hell by carrying wood using a twisted rope made of palm fibre that will be hung around her neck.<sup>73</sup>

This *sūrah* was revealed during an event when Prophet Muḥammad (pbuh) first began to openly preach about Allah and warned the Quraysh clan of His torment. Here, Abū Lahab retaliated back by saying “Damn you!”<sup>74</sup> This *sūrah* is a warning to Abū Lahab and his wife, Umm Jamīl, as well as similar people who hated and fought against the Prophet.<sup>75</sup> When the Hāshimite clan under Abū Ṭālib’s leadership was determined to protect the Prophet due to tribal loyalty, Abū Lahab swore allegiance to the Quraysh clan in boycotting his own Hāshimite clan to death.<sup>76</sup>

The story of Abū Lahab and his wife provides solutions for four major marital problems which are irresponsibility, moral decay, communication obstacles and financial crisis.

Irresponsibility and moral decay were portrayed by Abū Lahab and his wife in their attitude towards Allah and His Prophet, besides instigating numerous attempts to hurt the Prophet and even attempting to stop him from preaching Islam.

Communication obstacles and financial crisis in this story were based on Abū Lahab and his wife’s animosity towards Islam. This couple consistently used harsh and humiliating language, and also spent their wealth solely to spread animosity and hurt the Prophet and his followers which only proved disastrous. Married couples must realise that those who channel their wealth and effort for evil are self-destructive, and those who share a love for evil will ultimately suffer in Hell.

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11/01/taff-a-rare-success-story-for-all-childless-couples/.

<sup>73</sup> Abdullah Basmeih, *Tafsir Ar-Rahman*, 1309.

<sup>74</sup> Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr Al-Qur’ān Al-‘Azīm*, 2044.

<sup>75</sup> Ibn ‘Āshūr, *Al-Taḥrīr wa Al-Tanwīr*, 30: 600.

<sup>76</sup> Qutb, *Fī Zilāl Al-Qur’ān*, 6: 4000.

## Muḥammad (pbuh) and His Wives

The story of Muḥammad (pbuh) and his wives is mentioned twice in the Qur’ān, in *al-Aḥzāb* (33: 28-40; 50-59) and *al-Tahrīm* (66: 1-6) respectively. One of the important lessons from *al-Aḥzāb* (33: 28-40; 50-59) is the preference for the Hereafter. The wives of the Prophet complained about the little maintenance provided to them and requested for additional allowance. Allah revealed to the Prophet to inform them of their choice: if they preferred the worldly life, then the Prophet would arrange for their consolatory gift and kindly seek divorce (33: 28);<sup>77</sup> and if they preferred Allah, the Prophet and the Hereafter, then Allah will generously reward them in the Hereafter. When this critical choice was presented, all of them chose Allah, the Prophet and the Hereafter.<sup>78</sup> Although comfort and luxury are not prohibited in Islam, this was simply a matter of the Prophet’s preference. As wives of the Prophet and mothers of all believers, they held a venerated position and as a result, were tasked with immense responsibilities.<sup>79</sup>

By preferring the Hereafter, the missions and visions in the life of married couples would become wide-ranging and go beyond this limited world. This is necessary to enable them to control their desires and overcome feelings of despair, when faced with hurdles in life or when they make painful sacrifices for the sake of Allah.

The effects of preference for the Hereafter over a worldly life could be compared as follows:

Table 1 Comparison between Preference for the Hereafter and for the Worldly Life

Preference for the Hereafter	Preference for the Worldly Life
Gratification in the Hereafter	Instant gratification in this worldly life
Yearning to reunite with Allah in Paradise	Yearning for worldly enjoyments
Acceptance of life after death	Phobia of death
Absolute peace	Absolute chaos

<sup>77</sup> Ibn ‘Āshūr, *Al-Tahrīr wa Al-Tanwīr*, 21: 316.

<sup>78</sup> Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr Al-Qur’ān Al-‘Aẓīm*, 1491.

<sup>79</sup> Qūṭb, *Fī Zilāl Al-Qur’ān*, 5: 2855.

In *al-Tahrīm*, Allah revealed the story of the Prophet who had prohibited honey<sup>80</sup> for himself in order to please his wives. Married couples should know that marital conflicts are common and should be dealt with positively to strengthen the relationship, to provide one's spouse with peace of mind and to protect marital secrets, all of which are essential in a marriage.<sup>81</sup>

The story in *al-Tahrīm* also highlights the importance of seeking to please one's spouse. The Prophet aspired to please his wives: he helped them with domestic chores when he was home; he conversed politely with them; he was humble, patient, honest and kind to them; and he had the utmost concern and respect for them. Putting in effort to please one's spouse is one of the Prophetic traditions that Muslims should emulate. The importance of pleasing one's spouse could be highlighted as follows:

Table 2 The Importance of Effort to Gain Spouse's Happiness

	Pleasing a Spouse			
Methods	Treating him/her with gifts or good news	Being responsible, kind, humble, patient, and honest	Praising and complimenting any work performed	Helping with domestic chores
Facts	Marriage alone cannot make an individual happy, couples must work together to create a happy marriage. Efforts to please one's spouse will be rewarded by Allah.			

The story of Prophet Muḥammad (pbuh) and his wives provides solutions for five major marital problems which are irresponsibility,

<sup>80</sup> See Abdullah Basmeih, *Tafsīr Ar-Rahmān*, 1134. The incident is narrated in Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī: "The Prophet usually stopped at Zaynab bint Jahsh's house and took some honey. He spent his time a little bit longer there. This made 'Ā'ishah jealous and she conspired with his other wife, Ḥafṣah, that if the Prophet were to come to any of the two houses, she is to say: "Did you drink *Maghāfir*?" (*Maghāfir* is a sweet drink but it has bad smell). When asked, he answered: "No! I took honey at Zaynab's house, and I swear that I will never take it again. Don't tell this to anybody". There is another narration with a different reason, but the researchers agree with this narration.

<sup>81</sup> Ibn 'Āshūr, *Al-Tahrīr wa Al-Tanwīr*, 28: 345, 352.

moral decay, weak Islamic foundation, financial crisis and communication obstacles.

The Prophet embodied responsibility and high moral values. He loved and cared for all his wives and sought their pleasure over his own. This was clear when he chose to prohibit himself honey to seek the pleasure of his wives even though Allah permitted honey for him. His wives also proved their faith by choosing Allah and His Prophet above this worldly life. In contrast, an irresponsible husband with low moral values would lead to contempt and animosity in marriage, especially in a polygamous marriage.

Due to the strong Islamic background of the Prophet's family members, all of his wives chose Allah and His Prophet above this worldly life. In contrast, those with weak Islamic foundation would prefer this worldly life over Allah.

Initially, financial crisis created conflict between the Prophet and his wives. However, when given a choice, the wives chose Allah and His Prophet above wealth. It seems that one of the ways to decrease financial conflicts in marriage is to prioritise Allah and the Hereafter over worldly desires.

Allah taught the Prophet effective communication skills. For example, when Allah asked the Prophet to instruct his wives to choose, He also stated that the wisdom behind this instruction was to gain rewards in the Hereafter. In another case, when the Prophet revealed to his wife that he knew of her disclosing his secret to another wife, he did not delve into her mistake to further create embarrassment. The Prophet maintained excellent self-restraint and manners and managed to apply effective communication skills in his marriage. In contrast, communication obstacles such as using harsh language and harping on mistakes would lead to a disastrous marriage.

Married couples must take note that: (1) marital conflicts are inevitable, even in the marriages of the Prophet. The best remedy is to uncover and solve the cause of such conflicts; (2) the Prophet is an example of good character and an effective communicator; (3) one should strive to please one's spouse as long as it does not go against Islamic teachings.

## Khawlah (*Al-Mujādilah*) and Her Husband

The story of Khawlah (*al-Mujādilah*) and her husband is mentioned once in the Qur'ān, in *al-Mujādilah* (58: 1-4). *Al-Mujādilah* refers to a woman named Khawlah bint Tha'labah, who pleaded with the Prophet regarding a conflict with her husband, Aus bin Al-Şāmit.<sup>82</sup>

Khawlah's husband, Aus, had committed *zihār* by telling her, "You are to me like my mother's back!" This was a common expression of anger in the pre-Islamic period that nullifies a marriage. The revelation came down to end this improper tradition and warn husbands from uttering these erroneous words.<sup>83</sup> A husband's utterance of *zihār* cannot transform realities because his wife could never be his mother. The reality of his marital relationship with his wife could never be permanently prohibited as if they have parental relations.<sup>84</sup> According to the revelation, the husband must be penalised according to his capability, either by freeing a slave, fasting for two consecutive months or feeding sixty needy people. After the penalty is settled, both the couple's marital and sexual relationship can resume as before.<sup>85</sup>

When the Prophet informed Khawlah that her husband needed to free a slave, she replied that her husband had no means to do so. The Prophet then informed her that her husband needed to fast for two consecutive months, to which she replied that her husband was too old. The Prophet proceeded to state that her husband must feed sixty poor people, to which she replied that her husband could not afford this. The Prophet mercifully told her that he and the other companions would contribute a sack of dates. Khawlah replied she would also help him with another sack of dates. The Prophet finally said to her, "That is good and kind of you. Go and give charity on his behalf and take good care of your cousin (husband)". She did as the Prophet instructed.<sup>86</sup>

This story demonstrates how Islam emphasises on eliminating

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<sup>82</sup> Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr Al-Qur'ān Al-'Azīm*, 1835.

<sup>83</sup> Ibn 'Āshūr, *Al-Taḥrīr wa Al-Tanwīr*, 28: 15.

<sup>84</sup> Quṭb, *Fī Zilāl Al-Qur'ān*, 5: 2824.

<sup>85</sup> Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr Al-Qur'ān Al-'Azīm*, 1837 and Quṭb, *Fī Zilāl Al-Qur'ān*, 6: 3506-3507.

<sup>86</sup> Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr Al-Qur'ān Al-'Azīm*, 1836.

injustice in marriage and encouraging the growth of a peaceful marital relationship based on love and mercy.

The story of Khawlah and her husband provides solutions for six major marital problems which are irresponsibility, moral decay, weak Islamic foundation, financial crisis, health problems and communication obstacles.

Khawlah was a responsible wife who obeyed the commands of Allah and His Prophet over her husband. When her husband irresponsibly uttered the words of *zihār* towards her and later wanted to resume their marital relationship, she refused him until she sought advice from the Prophet regarding the act. She consulted the Prophet before pleading to Allah, who revealed the answer to her problem.

Khawlah also upheld high moral values showing empathy, concern, love and mercy towards her husband. Her strong Islamic background prompted her to consult the Prophet concerning her husband's deed. She knew that she should not obey her husband above Allah and the Prophet. When her husband tried to force his sexual desire on her, she overpowered him the way a woman overpowers a weak old man. She had the strong will power to sustain a marriage guided by the Islamic way of life, in which all matters should be in accordance with divine revelation.<sup>87</sup>

Financial crisis, health problems and communication obstacles were portrayed by Khawlah's husband. The extent of his poverty was clear when Khawlah needed to borrow a dress from her neighbour before seeing the Prophet. Later, when the Prophet told her that her husband must feed sixty poor people as penance, she replied that her husband could not afford that.<sup>88</sup>

However, Khawlah and her husband's poverty did not ruin their marriage or cause her to become a disobedient wife. She disobeyed him for speaking irresponsibly against the Islamic way of life. When the case was cleared, her love and mercy towards her husband became clearer and stronger. She accepted that her husband was poor and helped him feed the sixty poor people by providing another sack of dates. His old age also did not ruin their marriage and she looked after her old husband's well-being as how the Prophet

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<sup>87</sup> Qutb, *Fī Zilāl Al-Qur'ān*, 6: 3505.

<sup>88</sup> Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr Al-Qur'ān Al-'Azīm*, 1836.



advised. Even though it was his irresponsible words of *zihār* that caused a conflict in their marriage, it was settled by divine revelation. This story shows that love and mercy may surpass material needs, and married couples are able to heal their emotional injuries caused by marital conflicts if they forgive, forget and move forward from a painful experience.<sup>89</sup>

Researchers found that financial crisis is the leading cause of marital problems<sup>90</sup> and came to the following conclusions: (1) lower earnings predicted to cause more marital dissatisfaction and more psychological distress in married couples, compared to couples with more sufficient income;<sup>91</sup> (2) the most commonly reported complaints at religious departments in Malaysia fall under the category of “economic problem”<sup>92</sup>; and (3) high income individuals tend to be more satisfied with their marriage than those of low income.<sup>93</sup>

However, it is inaccurate to suggest that poorer spouses would have more marital problems than richer spouses. In fact, many poor spouses with an adequate sense of responsibility, patience, gratitude and humility can sustain a blissful marriage. Hence, financial inadequacy alone may not be the main reason for conflict in a marriage. Other factors such as irresponsibility, third party interference, weak Islamic foundation, moral decay and communication problems play more important roles in a conflict. There is no doubt that financial inadequacy might worsen the conflict, but it is certainly not the main cause.

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<sup>89</sup> Sarah Muñoz, “The Relationship Among Gratitude, Forgiveness, Conflict Resolution, Duration of Marriage and Marital Satisfaction” (Ph.D thesis, Hofstra University Hempstead New York, 2011), 17, (UMI No. 3468179).

<sup>90</sup> MohdTaib Dora and Noor Baiduri Abd Halim, “Issues and Factors of Problematic Families in Malaysia,” *International Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences*, vol. 1, no. 4, (April 2011): 155, [https://www.ijhssnet.com/journals/Vol\\_1\\_No\\_4\\_April\\_2011/20.pdf](https://www.ijhssnet.com/journals/Vol_1_No_4_April_2011/20.pdf).

<sup>91</sup> Sarah Muñoz, “The Relationship”, 13.

<sup>92</sup> RaihanahAzahari, “Factors Contribute to Marital Problems among Malay Muslim Women: A Case Study in Malaysia,” *Shariah Journal*, vol. 16, no. 2, (2008): 260.

<sup>93</sup> Zainah Ahmad Zamani, Rohany Nasir, RuzySulizaHashim, &Noraini Md. Yusof, “Effects of Demographic Variables on Marital Satisfaction,” *Journal of Asian Social Science*, vol. 8, no. 9, (July 2012), 48, <https://doi.org/10.5539/ass.v8n9p46>.

## Ungrateful Married Couple

The story of an ungrateful married couple was mentioned once in the Qur'ān in *Sūrah al-A'rāf* (7: 189-190). This is a story of how a married couple had deviated from their pure belief in the oneness of Allah to polytheism. When the wife's pregnancy approached its final stage, the couple was hopeful to have a healthy baby. They turned to pray to Allah, believing that He is the only God who can bestow them a healthy baby, so that they would be among the grateful servants. However, when their hope became a reality, they not only became ungrateful, but also committed idolatry against Allah.<sup>94</sup>

The ungrateful married couple portrayed in the story is a universal example of disbelievers such as Jews and Christians, who taught their children to ascribe partners with Allah.<sup>95</sup> These idolaters also named their children after idols, such as 'Abd al-'Uzzā, and vowed that their children will serve as servants in their idols' places of worship.<sup>96</sup>

Married Muslim couples are also prone to committing such sins. Among the aspects of ingratitude and idolatry that must be avoided by Muslim couples are: (1) praying for a child to a deity other than Allah; (2) making vows to other deities besides Allah during pregnancy; (3) providing offerings to deities besides Allah after having children; (4) loving one's children more than Allah Himself; and (5) engaging in superstitious practices such as placing charms on children for protection.<sup>97</sup>

The story of the ungrateful married couple provides solutions for three major marital problems which are irresponsibility, moral decay and weak Islamic foundation.

Irresponsibility, moral decay and ingratitude were portrayed by both spouses. Despite pledging to be among the grateful servants to Allah, they committed idolatry after being granted their wish.

A weak Islamic foundation could be one of the factors that led them to associate partners with Allah. For example, they may have

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<sup>94</sup> Quṭb, *Fī Zilāl Al-Qur'ān*, 3: 1412.

<sup>95</sup> Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr Al-Qur'ān Al-'Azīm*, 809.

<sup>96</sup> Ibn 'Ashūr, *Al-Taḥrīr wa Al-Tanwīr*, 9: 214.

<sup>97</sup> Mawdudī, *Understanding the Qur'ān*, 3: 110.

blindly emulated their ancestors by placing charms on their children and believing in its ability to ward off evil.

### **An Analysis of the Ten Major Marital Problems**

Among the ten major marital problems listed by JAKIM, irresponsibility and moral decay are the two problems that have been assessed consistently in all the above-mentioned stories, while the other eight problems were varyingly assessed in certain stories. The findings are summarised in Table 3 below:

**Table 3 Major Marital Problems Assessed from the Qur'ānic Stories of Husbands and Wives**

No.	Major Problems	Qur'ānic Stories of Husbands and Wives	Frequency of Assessment
1.	Irresponsibility	All stories	12
2.	Moral decay	All stories	12
3.	Communication obstacles	Nūḥ and his wife Ibrāhīm and his wife Pharaoh and his wife Mūsā and his wife Zakariyyā and his wife AbūLahab and his wife Prophet Muḥammad and his wives Khawlah and her husband	8
4.	Third party interference	Ādam and his wife Nūḥ and his wife Lūṭ and his wife Egyptian Mayor and his wife Pharaoh and his wife Mūsā and his wife	6
5.	Health problems	Ibrāhīm and his wife Zakariyyā and his wife Khawlah and her husband	3
6.	Weak Islamic foundation	Prophet Muḥammad and his wives Khawlah and her husband Ungrateful married couple	3
7.	Financial crisis	AbūLahab and his wife Prophet Muḥammad and his wives Khawlah and her husband	3
8.	Sexual issues	Lūṭ and his wife	2

No.	Major Problems	Qur'ānic Stories of Husbands and Wives	Frequency of Assessment
		Egyptian Mayor and his wife	
9.	Career dilemma	Egyptian Mayor and his wife	1
10.	Cultural differences	Pharaoh and his wife	1

Based on Table 3, the ten major marital problems can be divided into inner dimension and outer dimension. Irresponsibility and moral decay are the inner dimensions, while the other eight problems are the outer dimensions of the major marital problems. The analogy is like an iceberg that has its visible outer part above the sea, while the larger invisible inner part is below the sea. Amazingly, the invisible inner part is always far more massive than the visible one. The same applies to marital problems; the inner problems of irresponsibility and moral decay lay the foundation for the other outer problems including communication obstacles, third party interference and sexual issues, among others.

In order to solve these inner problems, married couples must aspire to be closer to Allah by emulating the dwellers of Paradise as opposed to the dwellers of Hell, as listed in Table 4 below:

Table 4 Dwellers of Paradise and Dwellers of Hell as mentioned in the Qur'ānic stories of Husbands and Wives

No.	Dwellers of Paradise	Dwellers of Hell
1.	Ādam and his wife	
2.	Nūḥ	Nūḥ's wife
3.	Ibrāhīm and his wife	
4.	Lūṭ	Lūṭ's wife
5.	Egyptian Mayor and his wife	
6.	Pharaoh's wife	Pharaoh
7.	Mūsā and his wife	
8.	Zakariyyā and his wife	
9.		AbūLahab and his wife
10.	Prophet Muḥammad and his wives	
11.	Khawlah and her husband	

No.	Dwellers of Paradise	Dwellers of Hell
12.		Ungrateful married couple

Married couples must realise that emulating the dwellers of Paradise entails an inner struggle to control one's own internal desires and responses. Marriage therefore, is considered as an arena for *jihād* for this reason, which is why married couples must strive their utmost effort into strengthening their marital relationship. They should epitomise virtues such as humility, patience and honesty as these are prime qualities in an ideal marriage. They should also cleanse their hearts of vices such as irresponsibility, arrogance and infidelity as these are detriments to marriage.

### Conclusion

In order to create a synergy between the Qur'ānic stories and JAKIM's post-marital modules, the following suggestions can be adopted:

Table 5 Suggestions for Synergised Activities for JAKIM's Post-Marital Modules

JAKIM's Post-Marital Modules based on Stages of Marriage Years	Adoption from Qur'ānic Stories of Husbands and Wives	Activities that Could be Synergised
<i>Bulan madu</i> (0-5 years)	Ādam and his wife Ungrateful married couple	<i>Mengenal diri</i> (Knowing myself) ' <i>Hikmah fakta proses kejadianku</i> ' (Wisdom behind the process of my creation)
<i>Sehati sejiwa</i> (6-10 years)	Nūh, Lūṭ and their wives Pharaoh and his wife Mūsā and his wife	<i>Betulkan yang biasa, dan biasakan yang betul</i> (Correct the common mistakes and practise the correct ones) <i>Mengenal diri</i> (Knowing myself)
<i>Semarak kasih</i> (11-20 years)	Egyptian Mayor and his wife AbūLahab and his wife Prophet Muḥammad	<i>Takhallidantahalliwi</i> (Cleansing and beautifying the soul) <i>Riadahruhiyyah</i> (Soul training)

JAKIM's Post-Marital Modules based on Stages of Marriage Years	Adoption from Qur'anic Stories of Husbands and Wives	Activities that Could be Synergised
	and his wives	
<i>Syurga cinta</i> (21 years and above)	Ibrāhīm, Zakariyyā and their wives Khawlah ( <i>Al-Mujādilah</i> ) and her husband	<i>Bahteramawaddahwarrahmah</i> (The ship of love and mercy) <i>Mesra dan kasih sayang</i> (Gracious and loving)

Finally, it is suggested that JAKIM should consider the following in its post-marital courses: (1) there are four major marital problems confirmed by JAKIM and the Qur'anic stories which are irresponsibility, moral decay, communication obstacles and third party interference; and (2) during the post-marital courses, married couples must learn to recognise these four major marital problems in order to strengthen the institution of marriage.

It is worthwhile to consider the post-marital courses as the best platform to propagate the Qur'anic stories of husbands and wives to Muslim married couples in Malaysia.



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