

Welcome to my weekly column on **Self-Care and Clarity of Mind**. If you're taking time out to read this, pat yourself on the back because you have shown commitment to taking care of your mind and body.

Today, In Shaa ALLAH, we will explore the topic: **Cultivating Joy In Your Marriage**

ALMIGHTY ALLAH enjoins a man and a woman in marriage, a union so beautiful in every way. Admittedly, it is not always a bed of roses. Cultivating joy in your marriage is a daily challenge. It takes unconditional love, dedication, commitment, kindness and tremendous amount of respect and understanding to maintain a joyful marriage.

We may feel that love is the only ingredient in marriage. Truth is, it all starts with respect. Respecting anyone means to have a regard for their feelings, rights and wishes. When you respect, you are one step closer to understanding. And when you understand someone, there is no room for assumptions or accusations.

Take a moment and ask yourself, when was the last time you displayed regard for your spouse's feelings, rights and wishes? How did you display it?

Having an attitude of respect and understanding is not the same as practising them. It is vital that your spouse actually sees you practising respectful words and respectful actions towards him/her.

Strategies to Cultivate Joy in Your Marriage

1. Look your spouse in the eye when you communicate. There is no barrier when you are together. ALLAH has enjoined you in marriage and permitted you to communicate openly. Looking in the eye when communicating reaffirms your commitment and caring nature.
2. Listen to the reply when she/he speaks. REALLY LISTEN. Do not formulate a reply while she/he is speaking. Do not interrupt. Become fully engaged. Curb your urge to correct or argue. You will have your time afterwards to respond appropriately. First, LISTEN.
3. Give undivided attention to each other. Multi-tasking is a wonderful skill but NOT when you are communicating with your spouse. No matter how important certain chores or tasks may seem, remember ALWAYS that your marriage is more important than any task you are concerned about.
4. Ask each other this question: "What matters to you most in life?" Understand the response given and honour those wishes. Knowing what matters most to your spouse helps you understand what you can do to fulfil his/her wishes.
5. Speak well about the people who matter to your spouse. You may not get along with all the people who matter to your spouse and that is fine. There is no obligation to get along. However there is an obligation to show respect. If you speak ill about people who matter to him/her, it is hurtful. Causing your spouse hurt will eventually turn the relationship sour.
6. Respect each other's fears and sentiments. Fear is very real to the person experiencing it. You do not have to encourage it but you need to show sensitivity that it is real to the person experiencing it. For example, "I know it makes you fearful when you think about our new baby. It is overwhelming for both of us. I am with you all the way. I am so pleased that you are trying your very best. That is all that matters. Allah rewards efforts not results. Keep doing your best."
7. Do not bring up past arguments/ negative events when addressing a new issue. Be clear from the beginning of any discussion that the topic of discussion is to remain a specific one and you both need to respect that rule. For example, if you need to discuss the budget for your next family vacation, it is NOT advisable to talk about how the last vacation was horrible because one of you forgot to book a hotel and ended up staying with in-laws!

8. Thank your spouse regularly for being your soulmate. Expressing gratitude increases positivity in your relationship.
 9. Emphasize each other's good points. Dwelling on mistakes or negative traits will only put stress on your relationship. Instead, acknowledge that you are human hence you have your own shortcomings. Similarly, your spouse may slip every now and then too. Say sorry, forgive and move on.
 10. When leaving for work, exchange Salaams and a loving hug. There is no shame in hugging your spouse. ALLAH has enjoined you in marriage and allowed you to display affection towards each other.
 11. Spend COUPLE TIME at least once a week where you are by yourselves for a couple of hours to share an activity you both love. This increases your compatibility.
 12. Follow ALLAH's commandment that the husband is the guardian of the family. The wife is created equal and has different responsibilities. Following this commandment increases harmony in the home. Disharmony creeps in when these roles are reversed.
 13. Be content with life and however much your spouse is doing for you. Express gratitude to ALLAH. If you want more from life, ask ALLAH instead of nagging or complaining to your spouse.
 14. Admire one another. Pay a compliment. Your spouse feels nice every time you compliment him/her.
 15. Protect each other's honour. Guard it fiercely. Do not speak ill of your spouse to another person, even if that person is a close family member. Remind yourself that ALLAH is watching you if you backbite about your spouse. If the matter is serious and your spouse's behaviour concerns you, seek appropriate guidance and professional help. Speaking ill about your spouse shows your poor character - it doesn't fix your marriage.
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If you wish to know about a specific topic with regards to Self-Care and Clarity of Mind, please email me on info@healingwordstherapy.com. If you wish to have a FREE one hour Clarity Coaching phone session, contact me on 0451977786

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