Excerpts: The Prophet and Imamat (pbut) on marriage and children

Lebanese Broadcasting Corporation: And is that why you have two weddings: The civil wedding and the religious wedding in your community?

Aga Khan: No, no, no. That is a form, but in fact marriage is not sacred in Islam. In reality it is a contract between a man and a woman.

Lebanese Broadcasting Corporation: But is it because you are in Europe that you do that?

Aga Khan: No, we do it because it has become a tradition, even in non-Ismaili Muslim communities, to seek blessings over the marriage etc.

His Highness the Aga Khan's 2001 Lebanese Broadcasting Corporation Interview (Aleppo, Syria and Lebanon) [Translation]
http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/6073/

"The most pleasant and blessed marriage is that in which there is least expenditure."

The Prophet (pbut)
Africa Ismaili, December 1977
"When I speak of marriage, I need not emphasise the joys of a happy marriage and fortunate parentage. They are inextricably interwoven -- warp and woof of the same pattern, and the pattern is the whole of life in miniature.

"He who refuses that venture because of the risk is refusing life. No. I have no liking for hermits and other solitaries who refuse all responsibilities. They may live in a town as likely as in a desert, and their avowed purpose may be to lead holy lives; but, in fact, if they have ecstasies, they are the ecstasies of self-indulgence. My concern is not with them.

"Those who accept the normal responsibilities of life, with all the chances of minor annoyance and utter catastrophe, may know many small griefs and much great sorrow -- that is why I called their joys dependent -- but, if they are at one with God and have lived manfully, behind the mask of sorrow, bitter though it may be, their souls will be at peace."

Sir Sultan Mahomed Shah, Aga Khan III's 1931 Daily Sketch Interview 'My Personal Life -- What a man needs to be happy'(London, United Kingdom)
http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/10471/

"A man who does not marry, who refuses to shoulder the responsibilities of fatherhood, of building up a home and raising a family through marriage, is severely condemned....

"To beget children is a very proper need and desire in every marriage; if after many years of married life there is still no issue, often a wife herself longs to see her home brightened by the presence of children with all the laughter, hope, joy and deep contentment that they bring with them. In other instances there is so profound a difference of character that a divorce is found to be the best solution for the happiness of both parties. But in every case -- whether a second wife is taken or a divorce is granted -- the various councils or (where there are no councils) the representatives of the Imam, have
an absolute duty to safeguard the interests of the wife; if a second wife is taken, it is a matter of seeing that full financial protection is assured to the first wife, or if there is a divorce, of seeing that there is a generous, adequate and seemly monetary settlement.

"It is important that it should be realised among non-Muslims that the Islamic view of the institution of marriage -- and of all that relates to it, divorce, plurality of wives and so on -- is a question solely of contract, of consent and of definite and mutually accepted responsibilities. The sacramental concept of marriage is not Islam's; therefore except indirectly there is no question of its religious significance, and there is no religious ceremony to invest it with the solemnity and the symbolism which appertain to marriage in other religions like Christianity and Hinduism. It is exactly analogous to -- in the West -- an entirely civil and secular marriage in a registry office or before a judge. Prayers of course can be offered -- prayers for happiness, prosperity and good health -- but there can be no religious ritual beyond these, and they indeed are solely a matter of personal choice. There is therefore no kind of marriage in Islam, or among the Ismailis, except the marriage of mutual consent and mutual understanding. And as I have indicated, much of the work of the Ismaili councils and of the Imam's representatives in all our Ismaili communities is to see that marriages are properly registered and to ensure that divorce, though not a sin, is so executed that the interests of neither party suffer from it, that as much protection as possible is given to women, and most of all that the maintenance of young children is safeguarded."

http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/1225/

"Children need to be cared for from the time they are conceived until they reach maturity and I strongly advise expectant mothers to come here [to the maternity wing and a child care centre] regularly."
Lebanese Broadcasting Corporation: Socially speaking, you have some differences with other Muslim communities; polygamy is forbidden amongst the Ismailis. And since when is this?

Aga Khan: It is. My grandfather that took that decision, and I have maintained it. 'Forbidden', is perhaps a word, which does not correspond, but we think that it is a practise that we should discourage. But it is not forbidden, you understand. Each family will decide ultimately for itself what it wants to do or not do. And that is what happens. But I think that this notion to have a unique family in the modern world, and I underline modern world, I don't talk of the past, I think that it is a social structure which is good. Today my worry is not there. My worry is the notion of unique family, which is in the process of destroying itself. Voilà! We are further than the polygamy today. Today we face a situation where a part of our world accepts that children are born outside the family.

"Man is to go through life not indulging in an impossible code of 'Resist not evil' but with patience, forbearance, argument, and kindness -- qualities which as even so unfriendly a witness as Mr. H. G. Wells in his History of the World admits, have always been greater in Muslim Society than in any other. They have, in fact, been the outward signs of Islamic countries. This absence of violence, this sweet reasonableness, this readiness to recognise that sex, marriage, parenthood are our highest duties and not sins that can only be legitimised by the fumblings of a priest or by idle ceremonies that
invoke fire and rain and the elements to clean up something that is essentially unwholesome. In Islam this is not the attitude towards instincts which are as natural as eating and drinking. Men and women should marry freely with their own choice, and that free choice is the highest and holiest of all blessings. The witnesses come only to insure the legal consequences of the marriage. And if it fails - as it must fail in some cases, given the essential nature of the instincts on which the attraction is founded -- a healthy, wholesome, unashamed divorce with stain on neither man nor woman but leaving each free to seek new and happy union is the only solution.”

Sir Sultan Mahomed Shah, Aga Khan III’s 1934 Foreword to ‘Muhammad: A Mercy to All Nations’ by Al-Hajj Qassim Ali Jairazbhoy (London, United Kingdom)
http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/10546/

"I have referred before to the differences between the Christian and the Muslim view of marriage and to the misunderstandings which arise. Whereas those brought up in the Christian tradition, with its sacramental concept of marriage, find it hard to understand the practical and contractual basis of the Islamic idea of marriage, for Muslims it is just as difficult to comprehend the laws in the West which compel the continuance of an unhappy marriage and insist on the artificial and arranged sin of adultery in order to bring to an end an association that has become insupportable and to permit both partners to make a fresh start in life.

"Maritally my third wife, Princess Andree, and I drifted apart, although our affection, our respect and our true friendship for each other were in no way impaired. In these circumstances by mutual consent we were divorced in a civil court in Geneva in 1943.

"Thirteen months later I married my present wife, whom I had first met in Cairo and whom I had known for many years. I can only say that if a perfectly happy marriage be one in which there is a genuine and complete union and understanding, on the spiritual, mental and emotional planes, ours is such.
"As a good Muslim I have never asked a Christian to change her religion in order to marry me, for the Islamic belief is that Christians, Jews -- and, according to some tenets, Zoroastrians and reformed Hindu unitarians -- may marry Muslims and retain their own religion."

http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/9933/

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Aga Khan: ... There is another difference between us and the West that causes trouble. Take the case of marriage. You may be surprised that I mention this, but it is a problem. In our faith, the element of puritanism does not influence what a man can do in his private life. For a Muslim, a marriage is not a sacrament. It is a contract between two human beings, and although they will pray and seek the blessing of God, they are not pushed out of their Church if they separate. In Western society, from what I've been able to tell, living here the fact that divorce is a sin, against God, causes tremendous heartburning. With us, there is not so much worry, all the time, whether one's relationship with one's wife should be dominated by religious or personal feelings.

Nicholas Tomalin: You seem very relaxed about this. I envy you.

Aga Khan: And yet if you examine the number of divorces in the Muslim world you will find we do not have half so many as the Christians.

Nicholas Tomalin: Do you avoid these troubles because you're not worrying about them all the time?

Aga Khan: Not exactly. It's just that the whole concept of God's position towards the human being in society is different. What is beautiful in life is also a revelation of God. We don't have to experience Him only in discomfort, pain and suffering. Don't misunderstand me. This doesn't mean we can go and live a
barbarian life, that we can be promiscuous and live in a most unbecoming way, that we can get drunk and live on opium. Not at all.

**Nicholas Tomalin:** What happens if you do that?

**Aga Khan:** It is not allowed. You are severely reprimanded. There is a very clear set of rules by which you can live.

His Highness the Aga Khan’s 1965 The London Sunday Times interview, Part I, with Nicholas Tomalin (London, United Kingdom) http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/1400/

"However, I must say that instead of tackling the matter [-- of the differences between my son Aly and Miss Hayworth and the resulting difficulties these caused on their marriage --] frankly and openly, Miss Hayworth somehow got it into her head that either Aly or I myself might try to take her daughter away from her, indeed kidnap the child. Therefore taking the child with her, she ran away from my son in rather extraordinary circumstances.

"Had Miss Hayworth taken a little care and trouble, she could have found out what in fact are the Ismaili religious laws and the code which governs all my followers and my family in these matters. Under this code the custody of young children of either sex rests absolutely with their mother, no matter what the circumstances of the divorce. Unless we were criminals, therefore, we could not even have contemplated taking the baby, Yasmin, from her mother. When they are seven, boys pass into their father’s custody, girls into their mother’s until puberty when they are free to choose. This code surely offered Miss Hayworth ample protection....

"Friends of mine and my lawyers have always maintained that I might have made a trust settlement or taken out an insurance for my small granddaughter’s [Princess Yasmin] future. Their arguments, though well intentioned, are mistaken. They have not realised that under Islamic law the custody of a female child, until
puberty, rests absolutely with her mother. They have also forgotten that there is no way under Islamic law by which a child can possibly be disinherited by his or her father. Were my son Aly to die, he is not allowed to will away from his legal heirs more than one third of his property; two-thirds must go to his heirs, of whom his daughter Yasmin is one, and he cannot interfere with this provision in any way. Nor does Muslim law allow a testator to benefit one legal heir at the expense of another. Therefore, whatever happens to my son Aly, the child Yasmin is bound to get her proper share of any estate which he leaves. So long as capitalism and any system of private property survive, it is unlikely that Aly will die penniless; consequently, there is no particular urgency about making financial provision for his daughter.

"A system of dowries and of marriage settlements is, I understand, developing in the United States, and doubtless when the child is of an age to contemplate marriage, either my son or I will arrange a reasonable dowry for her, in relation to the circumstances of the man she marries."

http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/9934/

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Paul Giannoli: We spoke earlier of veiled and unveiled women. Have you a Muslim or Western concept of marriage?

Aga Khan: I do not talk of marriage. So much has been written -- false things about it. I believe that no man holding public office is obliged to talk about his private life.

His Highness the Aga Khan's 1969 Elle Magazine interview with Paul Giannoli (France) [Translation]
http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/1527/

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Anthony Mann: You have often resented Press references to your family and personal affairs.

Aga Khan: I have always refused to talk about my private life. Any public man must have the right to have a private life and keep it private. In the West, intrusion into personal and private affairs is widely tolerated; this is not so in the East. Articles such as I have in mind do nothing for a public enlightenment; they are just a way of selling a magazine to a certain type of reader interested in such things.

Anthony Mann: When I raised the question of polygamy, the Aga Khan said that his grandfather favoured monogamy and, as far as he knew, all Ismailis were now monogamous, as were most Muslim communities.

Aga Khan: But remember (he added) marriage is not a sacrament to a Muslim, it is a contract -- though the contract may not be broken irresponsibly.

His Highness the Aga Khan’s 1979 Sunday Telegraph Magazine Interview with Anthony Mann (London, United Kingdom)
http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/1916/

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