



## Effects of Respect Between Spouses in Marital Life

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### Abstract

In the present study, the meaning of ‘respect’ for the spouse, the differences between men and women, examples of respect and the effects of respect between couples in their marital lives have been explained. The purpose of the current research is to find out the best solution for the stability and durability of life, peace and vitality of family members, fulfillment of the demands of members, meeting the needs in material and spiritual dimensions, and achieving prosperity and happiness. The present research is based on analytical and descriptive methods and religious and psychological data; its main findings are the necessity of paying attention to the differences and personality traits of men and women, paying attention to the tastes and the mutual understanding of the husband and wife about each other’s behaviour and knowing various instances of respect for the spouse.

**Keywords:** Respect, family, marital life, couples

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## Introduction

As a school for educating humans, Islam has the greatest care for honoring, revitalizing and promoting the family, and considers this holy institution as the center of education and the cradle of kindness and mercy, and considers the prosperity and misery of human society to be dependent on the goodness and corruption of this institution. The purpose of forming a family in Islam is to provide the material, emotional and spiritual needs of human beings, including the achievement of peace and tranquility. One of the important factors for peaceful coexistence and tranquility in life is to respect each other. Carl Rogers, a Western psychologist, maintains this: “Man needs others to value and appreciate him. The importance that a person gives to this issue has a great effect on his internal actions, stimulating aspects of his organism and his behavior. On the other hand, the need to appreciate others and value oneself is effective in human behavior and actions. The inner wish and desire of all normal people is to live in a calm, lively, friendly, moral and humane environment. Very few people escape from such a situation. Everyone desires to have a kind, polite, conscientious, smart and humble spouse.”

As for a woman’s gratitude to her husband, John Gray says, “Every time a woman appreciates what a man has done for her, he feels loved and gives her a point in return.” (Gary, 1381 SH) Men do not need women to do anything for them, they just want women to love and appreciate them. Therefore, women must appreciate men; otherwise, men become unconcerned about the family, and thus both lose and the family becomes cold. Since there are differences between men and women, these differences can have a direct effect on voluntary behaviors, their impact and the perception of the other person. The current research has been carried out with a descriptive-analytical method based on Islamic psychological sources and seeks to answer the following questions:

- What does ‘respect’ mean?
- What are the differences between men and women?
- What are the examples of respect between couples in marital life?
- What are the effects of respect between couples in marital life?

The findings of the present study show that respect for the personality of the spouse should be the sacred law of the marital life

and neither of the spouses should ever disrespect the other in any way and with any excuse. Even in times of disagreements and the peak of anger, they must consider maintaining the dignity of the spouses in behaving toward each other is the most important factor in a healthy and happy marital life. To achieve this, the first necessary requirement is the correct knowledge of men and women from each other. The worlds of men and women are different, hence maintaining respect between the spouses, bears fruits such as increasing politeness in the family, creating intimacy in the family, children's obedience to their parents, and so on.

### Research Theoretical Framework

In literal usage, the Arabic word “*ihtirām*” is not stated in the Quran. It is derived from the root “*h-r-m*” and “*ḥurma*”. “*Ḥarim*” [lit. “Sanctum”] of a well” refers to “the area that cannot be approached and no one has the right to use and dig another well in that area.” (Tabrizi 1393 SH) The Persian word “*Ihtirām*” in Dehkhoda Dictionary (1309-1310) is also mentioned with the meaning of esteeming and honoring (Panāhi and Sharīfī, 1391 SH).

In technical usage, the term “*Ihtirām*” [lit. “Respect”] refers to a positive feeling of honoring and paying attention to a person or an object that one considers worthy of respect. A person who respects another person or something pays attention to that person or thing and values him or it. This valuation may find expression in the behavior and performance of the respector towards the respected. (‘Āmili, 1395 SH)

### The Importance of Respect

Respecting and honoring each other is one of the moral teachings in every spouse's mutual relationship. As such, just as a wife must respect her husband and his dignity as her spouse, head of the family, and father of children, so the man must also respect the wife and respect her dignity as his wife and the mother of his children. Everyone loves his dignity and personality and is hurt if they are damaged. In the light of mutual honor and respect, the position and status of people are preserved and their personality is not harmed. Observing this principle of mutual respect finds greater importance for spouses who have naturally had many years of affection, love and intimacy, and such observance makes the family

stronger and stabler. Husband and wife should never neglect this matter due to their close relationship, and due to this close relationship, they must understand and respect each other's dignity and status. (Sharīfi, et al., 1391 SH) Respecting the personality of the spouse should be the sacred law of marital life. One should never disrespect his/her spouse in any way or under any pretext, even when there are disagreements and at the height of anger. Disrespecting others is a sign of the lowliness of the person's soul. The Prophet said, "The lowliest of people is the one who insults them." (Majlisi, 1403 AH, 52/57).

If the person disrespected is a believer, the ugliness of this act increases so much that such an act amounts to waging a war against God. Imam al-Sadiq said, "God the Almighty said, "Whoever humiliates my faithful servant has declared war against Me, and whoever honors my faithful servant will be safe from My wrath" (Majlisi 1403 AH, 75/145). Respect is not just the wife's duty. The husband should respect his wife too. Imam al-Sadiq quoted from his father Imam al-Baqir as saying, "Whoever chooses a wife, they should respect her" (Hurr 'Āmili 1414 AH, 5/61). Respect does not depend on age, whether old or young. All family members should respect each other. You can be certain that no one can easily love his/her spouse who has ruined their character. The more the honor between the husband and wife is respected, the less the contentions and the disagreements will be easily resolved; however, the more the wall of respect between the husband and wife is broken by them, the number and intensity of the disagreements will increase and they cannot be resolved, or they will become difficult to solve. All modes of behavior and speech should be such that the character of the spouse is not damaged. It goes without saying that preserving the dignity and personality of the spouse should be observed both in public and in private. Some people respect their spouse in public, but they forget to respect him/her in the privacy of the family. Some respect their spouse in private, but they do not respect their spouse in public. Just as spouses should respect each other in public, they should also respect each other in private. (Abbasi Valadi 1395 SH, 2/264).

### **The difference between the world of men and women regarding respect**

The first point that should be considered in marital respect is

the differences between men and women. These differences can have a direct effect on the other person's voluntary behavior and their impacts and impressions. To respect the spouse, one must first consider his/her feelings and demands, understand his/her world and know which behavior is considered a symbol of respect for him/her. The different states of husband and wife determine their expected behavior. (Hosseinzadeh, 1393 SH) The different ways spouses express respect towards each other are as follows:

- When men come home from work, they like to be relieved from the burden of work with the warmth of their wives' feelings. Hence, wives should cherish them. If they see that their spouses have entered their mental world, they should leave them alone for a while. But later, the wife should make her spouse talk by creating the context of talking to strengthen the feminine aspect of the man. Here emotions and feelings are revealed. Men often show their feelings physically when they cannot express them verbally. Therefore, creating the grounds for a change of position is one of the symbols of respect for the wife. (De Angeles, 1389 SH)
- Men's world is rational and women's world is emotional. A woman sees her emotional needs more. The secret of intimacy between them is that they understand each other and accept their differences. Therefore, appreciating the different worlds of spouses is a way of respecting each other. (Gray, 1381 SH)
- Women should make men look great. When men do something, women should let them think that they are unique. Do not criticize them, and praise their work and skills to make a way into their hearts.
- Never compare your spouse with others. Avoid mentioning the merits of others in front of him/her. It harms the good relationship between spouses. Spouses consider it disrespectful to be compared with others. (Sharafi, 1394 SH)
- Men seek freedom and independence. Wives should not subjugate men with the tactics they have in their marital life, destroy their sense of independence and freedom, and turn them into insignificant beings in the management of the house. Therefore, respecting them is actualized in giving them the right to make decisions and the right to supervise.
- Women give themselves the right to express discomfort based on their strong emotional world. Men have to bear this state arising from their nature. This is one of the secrets of intimacy. To respect them means to give them the right to be

upset and telling them from time to time that “It is understandable for you to be upset about this issue”. Sometimes, men do not pay attention to the fact that women are emotionally more flexible. (De Angels, 1389 SH)

- Women understand respect with the sense of hearing, sight, and touch more than by analyzing and distinguishing causal relations, which is an intellectual task. Do not forget to say “I love you”. Talk to her, laugh with her, walk with her and hug her. Never think that it is not necessary to say romantic words. Do not think so and express intimacy and friendship and express their manifestations.
- Pay attention to the seemingly small physical aspects that have a great impact on considering the spouse. When your spouse is talking to you, look him/her in the eyes very carefully and do not blink an eye, do not frown, and always have a little smile on your face until he/she finishes speaking. Smiling sweetens the bitterness of life. Pay attention to the clothes, the type and the appearance that he/she likes and put on the clothes with the color he/she likes.

## Signs and Instances of Respect

### 1. Mutual Greetings

Greeting is an expression of love, friendship and affection both at the beginning of a conversation and when entering the home. It is also an expression of politeness and respect. On the importance of greeting in social and interpersonal interactions, Imam Ali remarked “Get your tongue used to speaking softly and saying greetings so that your friends will be many and your enemies will be few.” (Tamīmi Āmadi SH, 1384 SH, 4/329) The Prophet Muḥammad also said, “Shall I guide you to something that if you do, you will be loved by others? Greet openly among yourselves.” (Hindi 1419 AH, 3/462). Starting the speech with greetings is an expression of desire for verbal communication and also an expression of liking. For sure, in this way, the greeter increases the friendship and affection between himself/herself and his/her spouse, and in the same way, he removes the grounds of any contention and enmity. Also, the more expressive and sincere the greeting and full of respect and honor is, the stronger and more stable will be its effect on attracting others, especially one’s spouse (Abbasi Valadi, 1395 SH).

## 2. Welcoming and Seeing off the husband

Welcoming the husband when he enters the home or seeing him off when he goes out is a sign of affection and intimacy between them. In addition to gaining spiritual reward, this act of a wife increases the love and affection between them. By doing so, the wife shows that she misses her husband when he is absent and becomes happy about his arrival. Thus, she does not leave him until the last moment of leaving home, and at the first moment of his arrival, she rushes to meet him and welcomes him warmly. This act of the wife is an expression of heartfelt affection, a sign of respect, maintaining the husband's dignity and making his greatness known to the family members; it also causes him to be attracted to the home and stay safe from spending too much time with his friends and being busy with other issues. In religious teachings, this wife's act is considered one of her moral duties and has a high spiritual reward. In a hadith from the Prophet Muhammad, it is said, "A man's right over his wife is that she lights the house (manages the house), prepares the food, and when the man enters the house, goes to the front door to welcome him" (Nūri Ṭabrisi, 1360 SH, 4/254).

Giving importance to the presence of the husband at home and expressing happiness when he enters and appreciating his personality and status, especially in the presence of the children and guests, causes him to have the impression that he is loved in the house and the family. Therefore, when he is with family members, he feels inner satisfaction and the tiredness of work is removed from him, and the next day he will go to work with great energy and hope; however, if the family, especially his wife, is indifferent to him, he becomes dispirited and loses the incentive to stay at home and not only gradually ignores the family, but also looks for friends or moral divergence to fill his emotional deprivation. (Panāhi et al., 1391 SH)

John Gray, a Western psychologist who has done many studies on counseling and family issues, writes: "If the spouses hug each other at least four times a day and express their love to each other, and especially do this when the husband enters home, it will be very effective in their relationship. Based on research, it has been proven that frequent contact leads to a positive emotional reaction and

causes more intimacy. However, it should be noted that these acts should never be done in the presence of children; because it causes sexual provocations in them and will result in moral damages.” (Quoted from Azarbaijani et al., 1396 SH).

### **3. Manner of calling each other**

The tone of calling the spouse and the words used have their own message. If each of the spouses calls the other one in a respectful way, it has a different message than when they call each other in a less respectful tone. Some people confuse intimacy with crushing the personality and give superficial justifications for this. (Abbasi Valadi, 1395 SH)

### **4. Division of Labor**

In some regions, the common tradition is that women do all the work in life, while men just have fun in their own circles of friends. This type of life is not desirable in Islam. Men should not think that they should not feel responsible in life and can put all the burden on the shoulders of their wives. After all, life is a combination of working outside and inside the home, and they must take care of a part of the jobs. The best way to divide the jobs from the Islamic point of view is that the husband takes care of the jobs outside the home and the wife takes care of the jobs at home. Imam al-Baqir said: “Ali and Fatimah asked the Prophet for advice regarding services, so the Prophet decreed for Fatima that she should be active at home, and decreed for Ali to do the jobs outdoors” (Majlisi, 1403 AH, 43/81) By dividing the jobs, the wife feels that she has a place in life and does not have to do all the housework; so, she has both the duties and the rights and her honor is thus preserved.

### **5. Respecting the spouse’s family**

Each person has a special sensitivity towards his or her own family. Therefore, the way spouses deal with each other’s families has a direct impact on them. No one should disrespect his/her spouse’s family. Disrespecting the spouse’s family is disrespecting the spouse himself/herself. Of course, respecting the spouse’s family does not mean allowing them to interfere in the spouse’s life. (Abbasi Valadi, 1395 SH)

## 6. Active listening

Stereotyped and fixed modes of behaviors are not always considered as respecting. Sometimes, silence in front of a person is respecting him and sometimes speaking with him, while breaking the silence is respecting. Respecting a great scholar is to sit politely before him, not ask too many questions, and wait for him to give a lesson. However, when you are in front of a normal person, repeating part of his sentences and completing his incomplete sentences, it shows your attention to him and his words. Therefore, it cannot be absolutely said which mode of behavior is a sign of honor and respect, whether silence or speaking. Each can be a sign of respect in its own place. When a teacher was speaking, a student tried to show that he understood the teacher's words well by completing his sentences and following him. The honorable teacher did not like this kind of behavior and said to the student, "You are better off using your ears than using your tongue", while many ordinary people may consider this kind of feedback from a listener a sign of attention toward themselves. In dealing with a woman, a man should consider her respect appropriate to her characteristics and observe it. Imam al-Baqir remarked, "Whoever chooses a wife, they should honor her, because, women are precious and admirable, so a person who marries them, should not mistreat them." (Majlisi, 1403 AH, 100/224) It has been quoted from the Prophet who said: "It is a form of chivalry that a brother listens to what his brother says" (Muḥammadi ReyShahri, 1384 SH, 4/80928) When listening to a religious brother is considered an act of chivalry, listening is considered as a moral virtue according to the Prophet's instructions for good behavior and observance of etiquette proves a must between husband and wife. Dampening a wife's spirit, depriving her of freshness and vitality, forcing her to remain silent and employing her in a position other than giving her true position is a violation of her rights. Then, no husband should expect humor and charm from her.

## 7. Method of making a Request

To do anything, you can ask your wife for something with a commanding tone, but you can express the same request in a friendly tone. For example, when a person is thirsty, he can ask his wife to

bring a glass of water, but another type of request is to say: “Wifie, would you please give me a glass of water.” The commanding tone is disrespectful, while the requestive tone with politeness conveys a respectful message (Abbasi Valadi 1395 SH).

### **8. Avoidance of Aggression**

A wife’s character is so delicate and fragile that even if there is a flaw in her behavior, aggression against her cannot be justified. A kind and compassionate treatment is essential for education and living with her; therefore, one of the criteria of respect between couples in life is avoiding aggression.

### **9. Appreciation and gratitude toward the spouse**

Appreciation and gratitude toward the spouse make a mutual moral instruction; both the husband and the wife should thank each other for what they do. Gratitude indicates an emotional reflection of love and good manners in the human soul. Every human being naturally likes to appreciate the goodness, love, and sacrifice of others and also likes to be appreciated. Appreciating others for doing something is one of the most admirable traits, hence one of the biggest secrets of developing friendships with others; it has also been instructed thus in Islamic sources. (Hosseinzadeh, 1393 SH) Its importance is double for spouses, as it plays a critical role in the warmth and intimacy between them; so that, it is considered one of their moral duties. Imam al-Sadiq said, “The best wife for you is the one who is grateful if something is given to her or if she is rendered a service, and if they take it back from her, she is satisfied and pleased” (Majlisi, 1403 AH, 68/44).

### **10. Avoidance of Abusive word**

The destructive effect of abusive words on the respectful virtues of the family cannot be underestimated. It is an abominable act that is not allowed even for enemies. (Nahj al-Balagha, 1371, Sermon No. 206) let alone for the family members. Saying abusive words is not only a very detestable moral act, but it also creates the grounds for enmity and hatred between husband and wife. Under no circumstances should swearing be used in conversations. In a corrupt atmosphere of swearing, the initiator and the culprit, to be relieved of the heavy burden of his

abominable act, must apologize (Kulayni, 1407 SH, 2/360); therefore, an instance of respect between couples in marital life is avoiding swearing and cursing.

## **Effects of Respect between Couples**

### **1. Increasing politeness in the family**

Respect increases the level of politeness in the family and builds a polite and peaceful family. Respecting inspires the message of honoring the recipient, and thus, relationships are strengthened and intimacy and friendship increase. (‘Āmili, 1395)

### **2. Increasing self-confidence in the family**

Parents are usually the first ones who are influential in increasing the self-confidence of their children. They play the most influential roles in children’s personalities. By respecting each other and using appropriate words and addresses at home, parents create and increase self-confidence in family members.

### **3. Children’s obedience to parents**

If husband and wife are congenial and kind and respect each other, their children will obey them. By disrespecting, arguing, and criticizing each other prolongedly, parents lose their authority in the eyes of their own children, and this causes the children to disobey them. In this way, expressing respect between spouses creates authority for parents and causes children’s obedience to them.

### **4. Preventing violence and aggression**

Violence and aggression are among the outcomes of disrespect between couples. Sneering and using rude words between couples is a form of violence and aggression, and children learn violence and aggression from their parents by observing their behavior. Accordingly, one of the fruits of respect between parents is preventing violence and aggression among children.

### **5. Intimacy in the family**

When parents respect each other, a sincere, friendly atmosphere is created among the family members. It increases the affection and friendship among them: one of the fruits of respect between couples is creating intimacy among the family members.

## 6. The Hereafter benefits

As a believer has intelligence and wisdom, he tries to show those modes of behavior that are simple and easy and have great rewards and value. Imam al-Sadiq remarked: “There is no wife who gives her husband a drink of water but that it is better for her than worshiping one year of fasting the days and praying at nights, and God builds for her with every drink she gives her husband a city in the Paradise and forgives sixty sins of hers.” (Hurr ‘Āmili, 1414 AH, 14/123)

## 7. Worldly benefit

Man benefits from kindness both in this world and afterlife. Having a long life is a natural desire of humans, as all people have an innate desire for living. Everybody likes a long life, apart from its side issues. It should be investigated what types of behavior prolong life. Knowing such modes of behavior motivates a man to act according to the desire that exists in him. Imam al-Sadiq remarked: “Whoever honors his family, God would increase his life” (Kulayni, 1407 SH, 8/219), Relying on this knowledge received from the infallible Imams, every couple must try to respect and do good to each other for enjoying these positive results.

## Conclusion

Paying attention to maintaining the dignity of husband and wife in dealing with each other and maintaining each other’s honor is one of the most important factors of a healthy and lively marital life. To achieve this goal, the first necessary condition is the correct knowledge of men and women of each other. The worlds of men and women are different. Their different moods, tastes, perceptions, and desires require that they know each other well to respect and understand each other and receive each other’s messages of behavior and speech correctly. Thus, the way they respect each other is not the same because of these differences. Also, the differences in duties and roles of the husband and wife in life are due to these differences. Awareness of the fruits and blessings of the husband and wife’s respect for each other increases their motivation to show respectful behaviors. When spouses are seriously committed to moral issues such as the wife’s seeing off the husband, welcoming him back, mutual expression

of love, cooperation and respecting each other's relatives, compassion and sacrifice for each other, and the like, the atmosphere of the home will be lively and attractive, and the relationships will have good strength. In such an environment, spouses will not have significant disagreements and will be loyal to each other and respect each other's rights. In such a family, the best emotional, security, and moral environment will be created and the needs of both parties will be met. In such a situation, the family will achieve sufficient strength and stability and the spouses will enjoy the best moments of life in the family. Also, the grounds for spending too much time with friends rather than with the family, addiction, moral deviations, and so on do not happen. In this enjoyable home, the children will also incline toward growth and will have a bright and secure future.

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