

Emotional Detachment Between Spouses and Methods of Prevention: Psychological and Sharia Perspectives

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Abstract:

A harmonious marital relationship has an effective and constructive impact on mental health, and its continuity is linked to the couple's ability to successfully cope with changes in the marital relationship. If the couple fails to make the relationship work, what is known as emotional separation occurs, and the spiritual marital bond built on emotion, affection and compassion is transformed into a formal bond dominated by formality and self-interest.

Emotional separation between spouses, now known as emotional divorce, has become a reality imposed on many families. It is one of the most serious emotional relationship problems between spouses, as it is a marriage lacking in emotion, affection and compassion – which are considered the foundations and pillars of every strong home.

For this reason, the study aimed to shed light on the nature of emotional separation and ways to prevent it before it leads to Sharia divorce.

Keywords: emotional separation, emotional dryness, divorce, abandonment, prevention.

Introduction:

Marriage is regarded by the Almighty as the strong bond and solemn covenant between spouses, as He, Glorified and Exalted be He, says: “ And among His signs is that He created for you mates from among yourselves, that you may find tranquillity in them; and He placed between you affection and mercy. Indeed, in that are signs for a people who reflect. [Ar-Rum: 21].

Marriage is a bond between a man and a woman who differ in gender, emotion and physiology; they form an interactive relationship based on affection and mercy, as well as mutual understanding and appreciation, in order to achieve a higher fundamental goal, which is to build a stable and harmonious family unit.

However, in recent times, this sacred bond has faced numerous crises and challenges, leading to the emergence of a phenomenon among couples that has affected their emotional well-being. This phenomenon is the emotional separation between spouses, which has come to be known as emotional divorce.

It is a form of divorce characterised by the absence of an emotional bond between the spouses, such that they remain linked only in name and in appearance, without having formally divorced. (Al-Masri, 2007, p. 27). This emotional separation has become a reality imposed on many families, and

it is one of the most serious emotional relationship problems between spouses, due to the severe psychological damage it inflicts on both partners. One study indicated that emotional divorce leads to low self-esteem, bouts of hysteria and panic, and health problems among wives (Mansour, 2009, p. 184).

Given the suffering and pain that couples endure in silence as a result of this type of divorce, in this research paper we have sought to investigate the phenomenon of emotional separation between spouses, using a dual psychological and Sharia-based approach, in order to propose ways of preventing it, for the sake of a future generation that is emotionally mature and healthy, before resorting to therapy, believing that prevention is better than cure. Consequently, the research question is as follows: What is emotional separation between spouses and how can it be prevented?

The following sub-questions stem from this main question:

What is emotional separation between spouses? What is the difference between it and Sharia divorce? What are the ways to prevent it?

1.1- Significance of the research topic: Its significance lies in the fact that:

- It is one of the studies addressing a phenomenon that threatens the fabric of the family and society as a whole, namely emotional separation between spouses.
- It sheds light on the nature of emotional separation between spouses and the difference between it and Sharia divorce.
- It explains ways to prevent this phenomenon.

2.1- Research objectives: This study aims to achieve the following:

- To highlight the nature of emotional separation between spouses and the difference between it and Sharia divorce.
- To outline ways of preventing emotional separation between spouses before it occurs, from both a psychological and Sharia perspective.

Secondly: The concept of emotional separation and Sharia divorce, and the difference between them

Here we shall discuss the nature of emotional separation as a compound term consisting of two words: (separation) and (emotional). To understand its true nature, it is essential to understand each component of the compound term separately; we will then address the definition of Sharia divorce, and subsequently clarify the difference between the two.

1.2 – Definition of emotional separation and divorce

1.1.2 – Separation: linguistically, ‘separation’ (al-inqita‘), which is the opposite of ‘connection’; one says: ‘He separated the thing, so it became separated’, meaning ‘he cut it, so it was severed’. (Al-Razi, 1999, p. 240). It is stated in Dictionary of Contemporary Arabic that it means ‘abandonment without divorce’. (Ahmad Mukhtar, 2008, p. 1713). Among the most prominent terms related to it are ‘separation’ and ‘parting’. (Ibn Manzur, 1994, pp. 62–63), and they are frequently used by jurists in the context of irrevocable divorce.

Linguistically, ‘divorce’ (talak) is a noun derived from the verb ‘to divorce’ (talīq), and it carries several meanings, including: ‘to send away’, ‘to set free’, and ‘to lift the bond’.

From this comes the well-known concept of divorce, as in: ‘The man divorced his wife by pronouncing the divorce’ (Ibn Manzur, 1994, pp. 225–231).

2.1.2 – Emotional (from the root ‘atf’): a man who is compassionate and kind-hearted: one who is generous and of good character. Al-Layth said: ‘Al-‘attaf’ is a man of good character who is compassionate towards people through his generosity... and ‘al-‘atuf’ is a woman who loves her husband. A compassionate woman is gentle, soft-hearted, submissive and obedient, without arrogance; and when you say a compassionate woman, she is one who is tender towards her child, and likewise a compassionate man). From the above, it is clear to us that affection is good character, gentleness, love, humility and the absence of arrogance. (Ibn Manzur, 1994, pp. 249–250).

3.1.2- Emotional separation as a technical term: There are numerous definitions of this contemporary term; some have defined it as ‘the lack of emotional affection and psychological harmony in the relationship between spouses, such that neither feels the presence of the other despite living under the same roof, yet they remain separate and isolated from one another’. (Abbas, 2015, p. 44). However, the definition we consider appropriate and closest to the Sharia term is ‘abandonment’ in the marital relationship – which is what we favoured when discussing the differences between the term ‘emotional separation’ and the term ‘Sharia divorce’ – as defined as ‘the husband’s abandonment of his wife; whether this involves emotional abandonment or a breakdown in communication, and the loss of affection and psychological harmony between the spouses, whilst the husband continues to fulfil other marital obligations such as maintenance and providing accommodation, so that the marital relationship appears to others to be intact, whereas the reality is otherwise’. (Al-Haqbani, 2013, p. 13). The definition states that it is the husband’s abandonment of his wife; for what is known as emotional divorce is most commonly initiated by the man, and whilst it may occur from the wife towards her husband, it is apparently less common. (Helmi Faten, 2002). As for the rest of the terms mentioned in the definition, their meanings are clear and require no further explanation.

2.2- Definition of Sharia divorce

1.2.2 – Divorce in Islamic law: is ‘the dissolution of the marriage bond between the spouses through specific words’ (Al-Gharyani, 2002, p. 663).

What is meant by the dissolution of the bond – the contract – of marriage in this definition is the removal of its Sharia provisions, such that the wife is no longer lawful for him thereafter.

It is thus apparent that the Sharia definition is more specific than the linguistic meaning of divorce; for it refers solely to the lifting of the Sharia bond, whereas the linguistic meaning refers to the lifting of both the Sharia and physical bonds.

3.2 – The difference between emotional separation and Sharia divorce

From the definition of emotional separation, it is clear that there is a significant difference between it and the term ‘Sharia divorce’, as they differ in their forms and rulings; the closest Sharia term to it is ‘abandonment’. The term closest to the correct description of what is known as emotional divorce or emotional separation between spouses is ‘abandonment’ in the marital relationship; for ‘abandonment’ linguistically means the opposite of connection, namely abandonment and severance, and in the marital relationship it refers to the neglect that occurs in the rights of cohabitation and companionship. (Ibn Manzur, 1994, p. 250). Technically, ‘abandonment’ in a marital relationship refers to ‘a husband neglecting his wife, showing no concern for her, and the loss of emotional feelings between him and his wife to varying degrees and in different circumstances’. (Al-Haqbani, 2013, p. 21).

Having clarified the term in Islamic law that most closely corresponds to what is known as emotional separation between spouses or emotional divorce, we shall now outline the differences between Sharia divorce and emotional separation:

A. **In terms of form, a valid divorce under Sharia is effected** either by explicit words, by implication, or by a gesture or written statement that serves as a substitute for words, in accordance with the stipulated conditions; As for emotional separation, this may involve him telling her outright that he no longer wishes to have an emotional relationship with her, or that he is unwilling to sleep with her, and the like; and emotional separation often occurs in practice when he neglects her emotionally and stops speaking to her.

b. **As regards the possibility of reconciliation**, Islamic divorce is divided into revocable and irrevocable. If it is revocable and the wife's 'iddah remains, the marital relationship is considered to remain in force, and the husband has the option of reconciling with his wife or not. If, however, it is an irrevocable divorce, the marital bond is dissolved under Sharia and they become strangers to one another, even if the wife's 'iddah has not yet expired; thus, sexual relations are not permitted, nor is even being alone with the wife. As for what is known as separation or emotional divorce, the marriage bond remains intact according to Sharia, even if there is no affection or emotional harmony between the spouses, and there is a breakdown in communication. Furthermore, emotional separation does not prevent marital intimacy or being alone together, nor does it require the wife's consent, as is the case in some forms of Sharia divorce.

C. **In terms of conformity with or deviation from the Sunnah**, emotional separation is not characterised by this, as is the case with Sharia divorce.

D. **In terms of the time associated with it** (immediate, suspended, or deferred), emotional separation does not fall into these categories, as there is no specific timeframe involved, unlike in Sharia divorce.

E. **As regards the duration**, in Sharia divorce, the expiry of the 'iddah in a revocable divorce has an effect on the ruling, whereby the wife becomes irrevocably divorced and her marital rights lapse. whereas in emotional divorce, the passage of time, however long, has no effect on the obligation of marital rights between the parties; however, if the abandonment is prolonged, the wife has the right to claim her Sharia rights before the court, and the judge will either grant her request or annul the contract, or grant her a divorce if the rights relate to maintenance.

F. **As for repeated divorces**, in a Sharia divorce this has an effect on the ruling: if he divorces her twice and the 'iddah has not yet ended, the marital relationship remains as it is and he may take her back; whereas if he divorces her a third time, he is not entitled to take her back until she marries another man. As for emotional divorce, the repetition of emotional divorce has no effect, as the marital bond remains intact.

Thirdly: Ways to prevent emotional separation between spouses psychologically and according to Sharia

To tackle the phenomenon of emotional separation between spouses, it is essential to join forces and intensify efforts, each according to their area of expertise. To put an end to it, a plan must be devised, namely by preventing it within our families by following the teachings of the Qur'an and the noble Sunnah of the Prophet, and by providing psychological guidance before it occurs and before it leads to Sharia divorce, and this is what we shall address here.

Preventing emotional separation or divorce is better and more beneficial than seeking treatment and solutions; therefore, we must strive to prevent it, as this is preferable to providing solutions once it has occurred, in order to ensure a happy family life characterised by affection and compassion. Among the means we consider effective in preventing this phenomenon are:

1.3- Recognising the importance of the foetal stage: Poor family relationships and the associated conflicts between spouses are reflected in the health and psychological state of the foetus. (Al-Najjar, 2014).

Parents must therefore recognise the importance of the foetal stage, as the foetus senses all of its mother's emotions and the emotional problems that arise between them, Just as the foetus inherits physical characteristics, so too does it inherit psychological characteristics. This has been confirmed by Dr Bouhnad, a psychologist, and Dr Fadwa Al-Mghairbi, a specialist in biological psychology (that a child inherits sadness, anger and shyness to a large extent if the mother experiences these feelings strongly during pregnancy). (Bouhnad, Ph.D., 2009). A child grows up emotionally healthy if the mother is at ease, and their emotional development is disrupted if the mother is not at ease; therefore, one cannot give what one does not have.

2.3 – Emotional Upbringing of the Child: A child is born with fundamental emotional needs for love, security, affection and tenderness, which parents must recognise so that these needs may be properly met. The necessity of a mother's tenderness towards her newborn is emphasised by the Prophet's (peace be upon him) praise of the women of Quraysh for their tenderness towards their children, as he said: "The women of Quraysh are the best of women who have ridden camels; they are the most tender towards their children and the most caring towards their husbands in their own right." (Al-Bukhari, 2002, p. 164), and 'ahna' means: she is tender and compassionate towards him. This was confirmed and explained by the human relations expert William Glasser, who said: 'Every human being has fundamental needs known as the "purpose of life", and among these is the need for love and attention.' Quoted from (Al-Mahrazi, 2011, p. 57).

3.3 – Emotional upbringing of children through setting an example: Parents should raise their children to express and manage their emotions by setting a good example; for instance, children should hear words of love, affection, kindness and forgiveness from them, and witness their parents exchanging gifts and messages of gratitude, admiration and apology. For a good example has a profound effect on a child's psyche, as children often imitate their parents, to the extent that they leave the greatest impression on them : 'His parents make him a Jew, a Christian, or a Magian.' (Al-Bukhari, 2002, p. 94), as the child observes their behaviour and speech at all times. (Sweed, 2007, p. 90).

4.3 – Choosing a Wife and Choosing a Husband: Perhaps the most important decision a couple makes in their lives is the choice of a life partner, as this determines whether one will lead a happy or unhappy life thereafter. This choice must not be made in haste, on the basis of emotion, or out of mere inclination of the heart, without taking into account the factors we shall mention. The Messenger of Allah, peace be upon him, said: "Choose well for your offspring, and marry those who are suitable, and marry them off to those who are suitable." (Ibn Majah, 2009, p. 142).

There are numerous factors that every prospective spouse should look for in a life partner, some of which are shared between them, such as (Islam, righteousness, freedom from immorality, beauty,

and noble lineage), and some that are specific to the husband regarding his wife, such as (modesty, obedience, and cleanliness), and some that are specific to the wife regarding her husband (the requirements of marriage). In this regard, our Beloved says: ((A woman is married for four reasons: for her wealth, her lineage, her beauty, and her religion. So choose the one who is religious, and may your hands be blessed)). (Al-Bukhari, 2002, p. 7), and he says : ((This world is a temporary pleasure, and the best of this world's pleasures is a righteous woman)). (Muslim, n.d., p. 1090), and he also says: ((If someone whose religion and character you approve of proposes to you, then marry him off)). (At-Tirmidhi, n.d., p. 385), and it is narrated from Al-Hasan that a man came to him and said: 'I have a daughter whom I love, and more than one man has proposed to her; to whom do you advise me to marry her? He said: 'Marry her to a man who fears Allah, for if he loves her, he will honour her, and if he dislikes her, he will not wrong her.' (Al-Baghawi, 1983, p. 11).

5.3 – Psychological preparation for those about to marry: Those about to marry must prepare themselves psychologically by recognising that marriage entails responsibility, sacrifice and acceptance of differences. If they are capable of shouldering this responsibility, each will look after the other's circumstances, and this is sure to foster the love upon which they rely to overcome hardships and family problems. Marriage is a sacrifice; it cannot exist without it, nor can it endure without it. They must therefore realise that their journey towards marriage is a journey towards sacrifice, for no family has ever been established or sustained except through patience in the face of life's hardships and bitterness. Marriage is an acceptance of difference, which is a universal law; life cannot exist without it. Allah, the Exalted, says: 'And had your Lord willed, He would have made mankind a single community, but they will continue to differ' (118) 'except those on whom your Lord has mercy; and for that He created them' [Hud:118-119] No two spouses agree on everything; they must therefore prepare themselves psychologically to accept differences, so that their married life may be preserved. (Al-Sha'al, 2010, pp. 51–55).

6.3- Addressing the problem through a private discussion: Problems between them should be resolved within the confines of the marital home, and they should not allow anyone to interfere, because resolving them between the two of them – the couple – is easier than involving family and relatives, which makes the solution more difficult and complicated. Moreover, family members tend to favour one side, and impartiality in such situations is rare and hard to come by. (Al-Sha'al, 2010, p. 221).

7.3 – Organising pre-marital training courses: The organisation of government-run pre-marital training courses, led by a select group of specialists in Islamic law and psychological, family and marital counselling, covering the definition of marriage, its importance, the psychological and emotional aspects for both women and men, whilst clarifying marital rights and duties, emphasising the importance of marriage and preserving the family through sacrifice, and not taking the solemn covenant lightly, will help reduce the phenomenon of emotional separation between spouses. (Al-Masadi, 2010, p. 15).

8.3 – Living independently: Living separately from one's parents gives the couple the freedom to express their feelings and exchange words of love and affection, which strengthens their emotional bond and allows them the freedom to choose their own clothing and appearance, Living independently

often leads to the resolution of daily problems between spouses as passing situations without anyone's interference. (Rabai'a and Salem, 2015, p. 526). (Bouhnika, 2017, p. 158). (Saliwa, 2019, p. 52).

9.3- Promoting and developing dialogue and communication between spouses: This is achieved by developing the skill of effective dialogue between spouses, which fosters emotional connection; for communication and dialogue between spouses lead to marital harmony and stability. (Al-Rimawi and Al-Shuwaiki, 2017, p. 302). (Al-Saleh, 2013, p. 285).

10.3 – Not leaving marital issues unresolved: When spouses make an effort to resolve their differences rather than leaving them unresolved, this leads to mutual understanding, respect and positive emotions between them, which in turn enhances emotional harmony. (Al-Sabban et al., 2020, p. 139). It is therefore essential to act swiftly and take the initiative in resolving the problem once the storm has passed, as prolonging the dispute sours the atmosphere, widens the rift and magnifies the problem. Each partner should strive to be the one to initiate reconciliation so that they may be the one to reap the reward and virtue described by the Messenger of Allah for those who hasten to reconcile with their partner. He, peace be upon him, said: ((...and the best of the two is the one who initiates the peace)). (Al-Bukhari, 2002, p. 53). (Al-Masdi, 2010, p. 18).

11.3 – Fulfilling duties: Each spouse must fulfil their family, financial and emotional duties and responsibilities towards the other. (Al-Saleh, 2013, p. 285). In this regard, the Prophet (peace be upon him) said: ((Each of you is a shepherd and each of you is responsible for his flock; the ruler is a shepherd, the man is a shepherd over his household, and the woman is a shepherd over her husband's home and children, so all of you are shepherds and all of you are responsible for your flock.)) (Al-Bukhari, 2002, p. 31). The Prophet, peace be upon him, issued a warning to those who neglect their families, saying: "It is a great sin for a man to neglect those who depend on him." (Al-Nasa'i, 1986, p. 268).

12.3 – Breaking the monotony and routine: This is achieved through recreation, such as taking part in sports and practising various relaxation techniques together; these help to alleviate the burdens and stresses of life, dispel negative thoughts, and reinforce positive attitudes between the couple. This is what our beloved Prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him, used to do with his wives. It is narrated from 'A'ishah, may Allah be pleased with her, that she was travelling with the Prophet, peace be upon him, and she said: 'So I raced him and overtook him on foot. But when I carried the meat, he raced me and overtook me, and he said: "This is in return for that victory."' (Abu Dawood, no. 29).

13.3- Nurturing emotional bonds between spouses: Spouses must recognise the importance of the emotional aspect of their relationship and strive to nurture it, given its role in fostering stability and spreading love and affection. Among the most important factors that help to nurture emotional bonds between them are: mutual respect and refraining from hurtful words; using compliments and flattery, as well as playful banter; exchanging words of love and affection; giving each other gifts, even if they are inexpensive; and sharing each other's concerns. (Al-Masadi, 2010, p. 18).

14.3- Rational use of social media and the internet: Both partners should focus on their duties and set priorities, so that they may lead a balanced life and not neglect any of their essential religious or worldly obligations. This is achieved through proper planning of work and rest times, avoiding wasting time on unproductive activities, and setting limits on internet use so that it does not distract from other duties. (Al-Masadi, 2010, pp. 160–161).

15.3 – Be wary of engaging in illicit relationships and marital infidelity, and steer clear of pornographic websites; for they serve to drain sexual and emotional energy and have a profoundly negative impact on a healthy married life. (Al-Saleh, 2013, p. 287).

Third: Recommendations:

- Specialised and in-depth studies should be conducted on emotional separation between spouses to prevent it and to investigate its actual causes.
- The government must organise preparatory training courses for young people prior to marriage, delivered by specialists in Islamic law and marital and family counselling, to serve as a preventative measure against family problems leading to emotional separation between spouses. Further training courses should be provided on the various forms of divorce to highlight its harmful effects on spouses, with a view to mitigating this phenomenon.
- Those responsible for the media in all its forms, staff at religious institutions, and those active in cultural and youth organisations must raise awareness among those about to marry of the devastating negative effects on family relationships caused by one spouse neglecting the emotional aspect of the relationship.
- There is a need to provide counselling programmes that help resolve the problem of emotional estrangement between spouses and develop communication skills between them.

Fourth: Conclusion:

We can say that emotional separation between spouses, or what is known as emotional divorce, is one of the most serious forms of divorce, as it lacks compassion and affection. and to prevent it, one must recognise the importance of developmental stages, from the foetal stage through to childhood, adolescence and young adulthood, and meet the psychological and emotional needs for love, appreciation and attention from parents and the family as a whole, and recognising the need to establish pre-marital counselling courses for young people; to educate them about the biological and psychological makeup of both women and men, the critical periods they go through at different stages of life and how to deal with them, the responsibilities of marriage, and the necessity of upholding the sacred covenant.

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