

# **Happily Ever After**

## **The Secrets to a Successful Marriage**

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## **Table of Contents**

<b>Introduction.....</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Acknowledgements .....</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>Chapter One: The Virtues of Marriage in Islam<sup>1</sup> .....</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>Chapter Two: Criteria for Choosing your Spouse<sup>3</sup> .....</b>	<b>15</b>
<b>Chapter Three: The Concept of Engagement in Islam<sup>7</sup> .....</b>	<b>47</b>
<b>Chapter Four: The Wedding<sup>8</sup> .....</b>	<b>51</b>
<b>Chapter Five: The Wedding Night<sup>9</sup> .....</b>	<b>56</b>
<b>Chapter Six: Men from Makkah and Women from Madinah .....</b>	<b>66</b>
<b>Chapter Seven: Let’s Do the Right Thing<sup>12</sup> .....</b>	<b>79</b>
<b>Chapter Eight: Grade Your Marriage<sup>13</sup> .....</b>	<b>103</b>
<b>Chapter Nine: Strategies to Turn Conflicts into Resolutions<sup>14</sup> .....</b>	<b>111</b>
<b>Chapter Ten: Being Part of the Solution<sup>15</sup> .....</b>	<b>118</b>
<b>Chapter Eleven: Communication Skills<sup>16</sup> .....</b>	<b>135</b>
<b>Chapter Twelve: Anger Management<sup>17</sup> .....</b>	<b>145</b>
<b>Chapter Thirteen: The Dreaded “D-Word”<sup>22</sup> .....</b>	<b>178</b>

<b>Chapter Fourteen: Money Matters<sup>24</sup> .....</b>	<b>189</b>
<b>Chapter Fifteen: Effects of Porn on Your Brain, Your Marriage and Your Sex Life<sup>26</sup> .....</b>	<b>201</b>
<b>Chapter Sixteen: The In-laws Syndrome<sup>29</sup> .....</b>	<b>227</b>
<b>Chapter Seventeen: Happily Ever After Factor<sup>31</sup> .....</b>	<b>234</b>
<b>A Final Word .....</b>	<b>248</b>
<b>References: .....</b>	<b>249</b>
<b>About the Author .....</b>	<b>254</b>

## **Introduction**

In the name of Allaah (SWT), all praise is due unto Him. May the peace and blessings of Allaah (SWT) be upon our beloved Prophet Mohammad, his family, his companions, his followers, and all those who follow them until Judgement Day. Aameen!

As a religious counsellor, who works with Muslims daily on a host of family and marriage-related issues, I can hardly count the number of nights when I've gone home after a session with tears in my eyes, wondering, "How could a brother do that to his wife," or "How could a sister do that to her husband?" I have witnessed the tragic breakup of families, the unhealthy impact that such breakdown has on children (whose eyes inevitably flood with tears), the ruining of households, and the shattering of dreams. No matter where I go in the world, the same issues between spouses arise repeatedly.

So, I have decided to respond to these ubiquitous afflictions that seem to affect so many households in our community by addressing them in a systematic way in this book you're about to read, praise be to Allaah (SWT). It is a discussion of all marriage-related issues and areas that I have come across in my years as a counsellor. I have drawn on a number of Muslim and non-Muslim sources, and have also added my own commentary.

So, in reality, this book is really a compilation of articles, interviews, discussions, Islamic explications, and other works that I've put together to give you, the reader, the

best and most comprehensive answers. I have cited all these sources in the references section. I take from a wide range of outlets and platforms, from IslamQA to *Reader's Digest*. In-sha-Allaah it will help couples and single Muslims get started on their journey.

As Allaah (SWT) is my witness, if He uses me, his humble servant and slave, to help just one family or to make a positive difference in even one person's life, then I will be the luckiest man alive. Please make dua'a for everyone who has helped in this noble cause and please ask Allaah (SWT) to make this endeavour purely for His sake and for Him to accept the effort from all of us. Aameen!

Those who maintain that these problems are not present in Muslim households are simply naïve or in denial. This is why I am going to use a straightforward, "gloves off" approach to address and deal with the most common social issues that have plagued our families today. I will be providing solutions from the Qur'an, the Sunnah, and from experts who are active in this field. After all, we are guided by the Qur'an to "Ask people of knowledge if you know not."

This book is meant to provide all the necessary tools needed to keep a healthy, vibrant, and successful marriage. It also provides solutions for conflict resolution and de-escalation to help you get back on the right track, In-sha-Allaah.

Moreover, you will also learn about the most common causes of divorce and how to prevent them, along with

gaining more insight into the secret ingredients of living in peace and harmony.

Are you ready? Bismillaah... (We begin in the name of God Almighty)

### **Acknowledgements**

All praise is due to Allaah (SWT), who provided the opportunity for me, His servant, to be able to help my brothers and sisters in Islam by shedding light upon family matters that touches every one of us.

I would like to thank my mother and father, may Allaah (SWT) have mercy upon them both, as they raised me, through difficulties and ease, with sweat, blood, and tears; my wife, who looked after them like her own parents (a debt I will never be able to repay); and my children, who give me the hope and the drive to push on in my work.

Special thanks go to a very special man (who wishes to remain anonymous, but Allaah (SWT) knows who he is) for his relentless commitment and follow up to see this project through, as he has done with all of the previous ones.

Heartfelt thanks are for all of the brothers and sisters who assisted in the editing process to provide us with the final product. Additionally, my sincerest thanks to the authors I have cited and whose work I have been able to read, dissect, and gather into this compilation or guide for the good of this community.

Finally, my personal gratitude goes to all of our sponsors, who will make this dream a reality, and help us to leave this behind as Sadaqa Jarriah (beneficial knowledge), and a legacy.

May Allaah (SWT) accept this from all of us.

Aameen!

Jazakum Allaahu Khayra,

Your student,

Alaa Elsayed

## **Chapter One: The Virtues of Marriage in Islam<sup>1</sup>**

Let me begin with a simple question: Why do or did you want to get married?

Most of the time I get the following responses: “My mom made me do it” or “Isn’t it the right thing to do?”

The companions (may Allaah be pleased with them) used to have multiple intentions for seeking marriage, so let us learn from them. From now on, we are going to change our intentions regarding why we want to get married.

Read and internalize the following intentions:

1. I want to follow the command of Allaah in the Qur’an as He told us to “marry the single amongst you”.
2. In another verse, Allaah speaks about the marital relationship as garments which has the following benefits:
  - a. It protects you from the heat of the sun and the cold in the winter, hence marriage should be a protective relationship, not a harmful one.
  - b. It beautifies you, which means that marriage should complete and beautify the relationship.



- c. It is the closest thing to your skin, which alludes to your intimate relations and to your secrets.
- 3. In another verse, Allaah says that “your wife is your tilth,” meaning your wife is a source of provision, i.e., your children.
- 4. You should follow the Sunnah of the Prophet Mohammad (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) as he said “Marriage is from my Sunnah”, and according to the Hadith (Prophetic Tradition), if the human being dies, their actions and deeds are cut off except for 3: ongoing charity, beneficial knowledge, and the righteous child that will supplicate for you. All three are embodied in your children.
- 5. According to the Hadith, the best money you spend is towards your family so you have to think about it as an investment, not an expense.
- 6. Furthermore, even intimate relations in marriage are rewarded, according to the Hadith.
- 7. According to another Hadith, “If you guarantee what is between your jaws and between your legs, I will guarantee you Paradise,” hence, when you get married, you are protecting your chastity and completing half of your faith.

Salespeople understand that it is the features that attract and benefit the sell. So let us look at the features and benefits of marriage in Islam. These features have

been adapted and quoted from the very useful Zawaj webpage, which features really beneficial insights on all marriage related matters for Muslims.

### **The Features and benefits of marriage:**

**1. Faith:** The love that Muslim spouses have for one another is (or at least should be) for the sake of Allaah, so as to gain His pleasure. It is from Allaah that we claim our mutual rights in marriage (Qur'an 4:1) and it is to Allaah that we are accountable for our behaviour as husbands and wives.

**2. Sustenance:** Love is not to consume, but to sustain us. Allaah expresses His love for us by providing sustenance. To love in Islam is to sustain our loved one physically, emotionally, spiritually and intellectually to the best of our abilities, (materially sustenance is the husband's duty, though the wife can also contribute if she wishes).

**3. Acceptance:** To love someone is to accept him or her for who they are. It is selfish to try to mould someone into someone we wish him or her to be. True love does not attempt to crush individuality or to control personal differences. Rather, true love is magnanimous and secures enough to accommodate differences.

**4. Challenge:** Love challenges us to be the best we can. It encourages us to tap into our talents and to take pride in our achievements. It enables our loved ones to

realize their potential and to have the most rewarding experience.

**5. Mercy:** Mercy compels us to love, and love compels us to be merciful. In the Islamic context, the two are synonymous. Allaah chose the supreme attribute of “Rahman” for Himself. He is the most Merciful. This attribute of “Rahman” (the Merciful) is mentioned 170 times in the Qur’an. Mercy in practical terms means having and showing compassion and charity.

**6. Forgiveness:** Love is never too proud to seek forgiveness or too frugal to forgive. It is willing to let go of hurt and letdowns. Forgiveness gives us the opportunity to improve and redeem ourselves.

**7. Respect:** To love is to respect and value our partner, their contributions, and their opinions. Respect does not allow us to take our loved ones for granted or to ignore their input. How we interact with our spouses is a reflection of how much we actually respect them.

**8. Confidentiality:** Trust is the most essential ingredient of love. When trust is betrayed and confidentiality compromised, love loses its soul.

**9. Caring:** Love fosters a deep fondness that leads to caring and sharing for all that we do. The needs of our loved ones take precedence over our own needs.

**10. Kindness:** The Seerah (biography) of our beloved Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) is

rich with examples of acts of kindness that he showed towards his family, and to his wives in particular. Even when his patience was tried, he was never unkind in word or deed. To love is to be kind.

**11. Growth:** Marital love is not static. It grows and flourishes with each passing day. It requires work and commitment and is nourished through faith when we are thankful and appreciative of Allaah's blessings.

**12. Security:** Love enhances our image and beautifies our world. It provides emotional security and physical well-being.

**13. Selflessness:** Love gives unconditionally and protects dutifully.

**14. Truthfulness:** Love is honesty without cruelty and loyalty without compromise.

## **SEVEN BENEFITS OF EARLY MARRIAGE FROM THE BEST MUSLIMS:<sup>2</sup>**

Marriage is an important facet of one's life. Nowadays, it has become a norm in society to settle down after you reach the age of 30. Although there might be reasons for such a scenario, it does more harm than good to a person. We need to understand that early marriage has its own set of advantages. Today, people prolong commitment unnecessarily and wait until they reach 30-35 years of age to marry, eventually realizing

that the longer they waited, the more difficult it is to adjust to married life.

To avoid the repercussions of late marriage, you need to take into consideration the following benefits of an early marriage. The following points are adapted and quoted from the highly useful blog from Best Muslim Experience, a very useful website on the nature and implications of Muslim marriage:

### **1. It Helps You Build a Strong Relationship**

When you get married at an early age, you tend to build a long-lasting relationship with your spouse. By getting married in your early 20s, you give yourself and your spouse enough time to understand each other. This helps both of you to recognize each other's strengths and weaknesses, which in turn helps build a strong emotional bond.

### **2. You will be a Happy Parent**

Marrying earlier means that you will have more time and energy to raise your children. This is important, as your kids need you the most in their formative years. By giving them quality time, you help nurture their mental, emotional and physical skills at the right time, which can be more difficult to do if you get married in your mid to late 30s.

### **3. You Will Be More Compatible With Each Other**

Getting married at an early age translates into a better understanding between husband and wife. You are both

likely to emulate some of each other's attitudes and behaviours since you spend so much time together. On the contrary, if you marry someone in their mid or late 30s, you may find it difficult to understand their temperament. This, in turn, affects your equilibrium with your spouse, who also finds it difficult to adjust to the relationship.

Getting married younger means that you are in a stage of development that is more elastic. Your attitudes, beliefs, goals, and personality are all more malleable, making you far more adaptable as a life partner. As you age, you become more fixed in your ways. It then becomes more difficult to adjust your views, etc. for another person, which can lead to unnecessary conflict.

#### **4. You Will Enjoy More Years of Married Life Together**

Early marriage generally means that you will end up spending more time with each other. Having children earlier will translate into more time spent enjoying each other as opposed to getting married late and being under constant pressure to have children.

#### **5. You Will Have Fully Grown Children By the Time You Hit 60**

Getting married early means that your kids will be mature enough to look after themselves when you reach your 60s. This way, you do not have to go through the hassles of their education and careers in your old age. Instead, you can cherish that time with your

spouse by doing the things you had planned for when you retire.

#### **6. You Will Prepare Yourself for Future Challenges**

Marriage is a big responsibility that prepares you for bigger challenges ahead. When you get married at an early age, you are able to develop mental capabilities and skills that will play a vital role in helping you cope with future life experiences. In the long run, you will prepare yourself for bigger challenges. In addition, you will gain a partner in crime that can help you tackle the punches life throws your way, in-sha-Allaah!

#### **7. It Bridges the Age Gap between You and Your Kids**

When you marry at an early age, you are likely to develop a strong bond with your kids. On the contrary, when you become a parent in your late 30s, you have to race against time to carry on the responsibilities of providing for your family. Therefore, you hardly have time to spend with your kids. By the time they reach their teenage years, you may be at least 50-years-old, which, in turn, creates a generation gap between you and your children.

## **Chapter Two: Criteria for Choosing your Spouse<sup>3</sup>**

This chapter will be concerned with the search for a righteous Muslim wife. When I ask the youth what they remember about the four criteria from the Hadith regarding finding a suitable spouse, they almost always tell me, “her beauty.” When I ask them what they’re looking for, they reply with, “36-24-36! I want her to be tall with, beautiful silky hair, ambitious, respects her elders, is good to the neighbours, can multitask, loves children, obedient, has a sense of humour, likes sports, laughs at my jokes...” and the list is too long to mention. Al-Qattan said, “Wallaahi, if we find this woman, we will pledge allegiance for her to lead this Ummah.”

So, stop seeing her face in the stars, come back down to earth, and let us get real, where real women do not come straight out of Bollywood movies. The following criteria are taken from the always useful Islamweb webpage, which is a good source of information on this and related topics.

### **Religion**

Among the many criteria in selecting a life partner, the most important is religion. Islam has established the importance of choosing a religious wife because it is faith that protects a woman from committing any act that is prohibited. A religious woman always strives to keep away from whatever enrages Allaah, The Almighty, or dishonours her husband. On the other hand, a



corrupt woman, particularly one who takes extreme pride in her beauty or wealth, does not adhere to the teachings of Islam and is certainly prone to the devil's insinuations, which may trick her into not adequately safeguarding her role as a wife. Hence, Islam urges men to prefer a religious woman, and every Muslim household should be meticulous in their search for such a woman.

The Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him, may Allaah exalt his mention) guides us in what is best in this regard and pointed out the decisive factors which can help people choose a wife, when he said: "A woman is married for four things: her wealth, her noble ancestry, her beauty and her religion. So win the religious woman; (otherwise) you will be a loser." [Al-Bukhari] This stresses that if we overlook the religious aspect and pursue only attractiveness, riches, or noble lineage, we would lose out, indicating we have not aimed high enough.

This Hadith was narrated by Al-Bukhari (4802) and Muslim (1466) from Abu Hurairah (may Allaah be pleased with him), from the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him), who said: "A woman may be married for four things: her wealth, her lineage, her beauty and her religious commitment. Seek the one who is religiously committed. May your hands be rubbed with dust i.e. may you prosper."

Al-Nawawi (may Allaah have mercy on him) said in Sahih Muslim:

“The correct view concerning the meaning of this Hadith is that the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) spoke of what people usually do when they seek these four characteristics, the last of which in their view is religious commitment. However, if you are seeking to follow the right way, you should seek the one who is religiously committed.”

This Hadith encourages us to seek the company of religiously committed people in all aspects of life because the one who keeps company with them will benefit from their good attitude and good ways and will be protected from any negative influence.

Al-Mubaarakfoori said in Tuhfat al-Ahwadhi:

“Al-Qaadi (may Allaah have mercy on him) said: ‘It is the people’s custom to seek certain characteristics in women and to choose a wife for a certain quality. It befits those who are religiously committed to base their actions on religious guidance, especially with regard to matters that are serious and have lasting effects.’”

The Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him, may Allaah exalt his mention) commanded us, saying: “Do not marry women for their good looks as their beauty might destroy them and do not marry them for their wealth as their riches might lead them to be overbearing.” [Ibn Maajah]

Islam has not set a criterion that emphasizes beauty, as not all men can collectively agree on the beauty of a single woman. It has, however, stated that beauty in a wife is indeed in the eyes of her beholder, the husband. Hence, one must not merely focus on a woman's looks, affluence or family at the expense of religion; indeed, as someone once said, beauty within an evil soul is like a lantern on a Magi's grave.

However, if a pious woman also possesses good looks, wealth or a noble lineage, then that is the most preferable but, even in that case, religion must be the deciding factor.

Our righteous predecessors were keen on selecting religious wives, regardless of their looks and social or financial status. The Commander of the Believers, 'Umar ibn Al-Khattab (may Allaah be pleased with him), was once so impressed by the pious daughter of a woman who was a milk vendor that he recommended his son 'Aasim (may Allaah be pleased with him) marry her. According to reliable historians, 'Umar (may Allaah be pleased with him) mentioned that had he wanted to marry someone himself, it would have been her, as Imam Ibn Al-Jawzi (may Allaah have mercy upon him) narrates:

"Ibn Zayd narrated on the authority of the grandfather of Aslam when he said, 'Once I went with Umar (may Allaah be pleased with him) while he was on one of his night walks in Madinah. He felt tired, so he leaned

against a wall and heard a woman telling her daughter to mix the milk with water before selling it. The daughter told her that 'Umar, the Commander of the believers, forbade that but the mother insisted, saying that she was in a place where 'Umar (may Allaah be pleased with him) and his deputy could not see her. However, the girl said, '[I swear] by Allaah, I will not obey him publicly and disobey him secretly.' The Commander of the Believers, meanwhile, heard all this; he then looked at me and instructed: 'O Aslam, mark this door.' He continued on in his walk and in the morning, he called me, and said, 'O Aslam! Go to the house that you marked and find out who the speakers were and see if there is a man [in the house].' I went there and discovered that they were an unmarried girl and her mother and that they lived together without anyone else. I returned and told Umar (may Allaah be pleased with him). He called his sons and said to them, 'Does any of you need a wife? Had your father been capable of getting married, he would have hastened to marry this woman. I wish that one of you would marry her.' Therefore, 'Aasim said, 'O father! As you know, I have no wife, so [I believe] I am more entitled to marry her.' Umar sent someone to propose to the milk seller's daughter on behalf of his son and the two soon married. The young woman gave birth to a daughter who later married 'Abdul-'Azeez ibn Marawaan; and this girl gave birth to the fifth Rightly-Guided Caliph, Umar ibn 'Abdul-'Azeez (may Allaah have mercy upon him)."

Hence, the fruit of this noble marriage was the birth of a Caliph who was unprecedented in his justice and asceticism and in his popularity with his subjects.

As for the particular characteristics of a righteous marriage prospect, the best of mankind, the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him, may Allaah exalt his mention) said in a Hadith on the authority of Ibn ‘Abbaas (may Allaah be pleased with him): “Would you like me to tell you about the best treasure a man could have? [She is] a righteous woman, who pleases him when he looks at her, preserves his honour when he is away from her and acts in accordance with what he asks of her.”

In another Hadith on the authority of Abu Umaamah (may Allaah be pleased with him), the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him, may Allaah exalt his mention) said: “The best that benefits a believer, after [possessing] the fear of Allaah The Almighty, is a pious wife who minds what he bids her, pleases him when he looks at her, helps him fulfill his oath and protects her chastity and his property in his absence.”[Ibn Maajah]

Such a righteous, religious woman certainly exists! When you are searching for your wife, you should keep religion as the most preferred criteria.

## **Morals**

The second criterion in selecting a wife, which is closely tied to the first, is that she must possess good morals. Indeed, a truly religious woman would have good character, as her faith would prevent her from evil speech, hurtful words, gossip or, evil actions. Having good morals is a basic characteristic when looking for a wife as the wise man Luqmaan rightly advised his son: “O son! Seek refuge with Allaah The Almighty from an immoral woman as she would age you before your time. O son! Ask Allaah The Almighty to protect you from the evil of women and to grant you the best of them. Endeavor to find a righteous woman, so you can be happy for life.”

## **Fertility**

Once again, as a matter of a better (and not only) choice, Islam urges a Muslim to marry fertile women.

The Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him, may Allaah exalt his mention) forbade Muslims from celibacy and ordered them to look for fertile women as spouses, saying: “Marry affectionate and fertile women as I will be proud of your great number, among the Prophet, peace and blessing of Allaah be upon him, on the Day of Judgment.” [Abu Daawood and An-Nasaa’i]

In another instance, a man came to the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him, may Allaah exalt

his mention), seeking his advice on whether he should marry a woman who is beautiful but infertile the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him, may Allaah exalt his mention) said: “No.” Then, he came to ask the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him, may Allaah exalt his mention) a second time, and he forbade him again. After he came a third time, he, sallallaahu `alayhi wa sallam (may Allaah exalt his mention) said, “Marry the affectionate and fertile women as I shall outnumber people by you (on the Day of Judgment).” [Abu Daawood and An-Nasaa’i]

### **Closeness in culture and age**

Homogeneity in marriage, according to Islamic jurisprudence, is in choosing a wife that is close to the man in age, culture and family background. Due, in part, to the similar standards of like-minded couples, it can make it easier for them to maintain the harmony of marital life.

However, scholars have different opinions in this regard. Some of them say that this is necessary, basing their stance on some Hadith of the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him, may Allaah exalt his mention), such as the one when he said, “Choose for your semen (i.e. children); marry suitable people [to each other] and get married to suitable partners.” [Ibn Maajah]

However, some scholars disagree, saying this cannot stand as proof as all Muslims are competent for each other. There are Hadiths that support this opinion, such as the one narrated by Al-Bukhari (may Allaah have mercy upon him) in which Sahl (may Allaah be pleased with him) relates that the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him, may Allaah exalt his mention) asked them about a man that passed by them. The people said, "He is worthy of being accepted when he proposes for marriage, of his intercession being given consideration and being listened to when he speaks." After that, one of the poor Muslims passed by them and the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him, may Allaah exalt his mention) asked them about him, whereupon they remarked: "He is not worthy of being accepted when he proposes or intercedes or of being listened to when he speaks." The Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him, may Allaah exalt his mention) then stated: "The latter is better than many men like the former," apparently based on his religion and morals.

### **Criteria for Choosing your Spouse (The Husband)<sup>4</sup>**

Now, let us move onto what sisters should look for when seeking a righteous man for a husband. Usually, sisters look for stability and security in marriage. They look for someone to love, to have children and to grow old with.



If all fails, please do not forget the four basic characteristics that are beneficial in males: QAWI, AMEEN, KHULQ, and DEEN (strength, trustworthiness, good character, and religious commitment).

Please note that strength and trustworthiness come together in the Qur'an because if he is not trustworthy, he may abuse his power. Good character is likewise related to religious commitment in the Hadith because good character is an indication of the fruit of Ibadah (acts of worship).

The following is a description of the most important qualities, which should be present in the man you choose or accept to be your husband and the father of your children (if Allaah decrees that you will have children). It was adapted and quoted from the Muslim website, IslamQA, a popular Muslim website that features questions and answers to everyday problems and solutions for Muslims.

Religious commitment: This is the most important thing to look for in the man you want to marry. The husband should be a Muslim who adheres to all the laws and teachings of Islam in his daily life. The woman's guardian (wali) should strive to check out this matter and not rely only on outward appearances. One of the most important things to ask about is the man's prayer (salaah); the one who neglects the rights of Allaah is more likely to neglect the rights of others. The true believer does not oppress or mistreat his wife; if he

loves her, he honours her and even if he does not love her, he does not mistreat or humiliate her. It is very rare to find this attitude among those who are not sincere Muslims. Allaah says (interpretation of the meanings):

*“And verily, a believing slave is better than a (free) Mushrik (idolater), even though he pleases you.” [al-Baqarah 2:221]*

*“Verily, the most honourable of you with Allaah is that (believer) who has At-Taqwaa [i.e. he is one of the Muttaqoon (the pious)].” [al-Hujuraat 49:13]*

*“Good statements are for good people (or good women for good men) and good people for good statements (or good men for good women).” [al-Noor 24:26]*

The Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) said:

*“If there comes to you one whose religious commitment and attitude pleases you, then marry [your female relative who is under your care] to him, for if you do not do that, there will be tribulation on earth and much corruption.” [Narrated by al-Tirmidhi and classed as Sahih by al-Albaani in Sahih Sunan al-Tirmidhi, 1084].*

As well as being religiously committed, it is preferable that he should come from a good family and a known lineage. If two men come to propose marriage to one woman and they are equal in terms of religious

commitment, preference then should be given to the one who comes from a family who is known for its adherence to the commands of Allaah. The righteousness of the husband's close relatives can be passed on to his children and his good origins and ties of lineage will hold him accountable for his actions. The righteousness of the father and grandfather will prove beneficial to the children and grandchildren. Allaah says (interpretation of the meaning):

*“And as for the wall, it belonged to two orphan boys in the town; and there was under it a treasure belonging to them; and their father was a righteous man, and your Lord intended that they should attain their age of full strength and take out their treasure as mercy from your Lord.” [al-Kahf 18:82].*

Notice how Allaah protected their father's wealth for the two boys after the father died, in honour of his righteousness and taqwaa. By the same token, if the husband comes from a righteous family and his parents are good, then Allaah will make things easy for him and protect him to honour his parents.

It is preferable if he has sufficient wealth to keep him and his family from having to ask people for anything because the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) said to Fatimah bint Qays (may Allaah be pleased with her), when she came to consult him about three men who had proposed marriage to her: “As for Mu'aawiyah, he is a poor man who has no wealth...”

[Narrated by Muslim, 1480]. It is not essential that he should be a businessman or rich. It is sufficient for him to have an income that will keep him and his family from having to ask people for anything. If there is a choice between a man who is religiously committed and a man who is wealthy, then the religious man should be given preference over the wealthy man.

It is preferable that he should be kind and gentle towards women because the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) said to Fatimah bint Qays in the Hadith quoted above, "As for Abu Jaham, his stick never leaves his shoulder," referring to the fact that he often used to beat woman.

It is preferred that he is of sound body and healthy, free of faults, sickness, etc. and not disabled or sterile.

It is preferable that he should have knowledge of the Qur'an and Sunnah; if you find someone like this, you should be aware that it is something rare.

It is permissible for the woman to look at the man who comes to propose marriage and for him to look at her. This should be in the presence of her mahram and it is not permitted to look more than is necessary, or for him to see her alone or for her to go out with him on her own or to meet repeatedly for no reason.

The woman's wali (guardian) should check on the man who proposes marriage to the woman who is under his guardianship. He should ask those he trusts among the

ones who mix with him and who know him about his commitment to Islam and his trustworthiness. He should ask them for an honest opinion and seek their sincere and sound advice.

Before and during all of this, you must turn towards Allaah and pray to Him to make it easy for you and to help you make a good, wise choice. Then, after all these efforts, when you have decided on a particular person, you should pray Istikhaarah, asking Allaah for that which is best for you.

### **Compatibility between Spouses<sup>5</sup>**

**It is important now to give some overall context to the principles and ideals when it comes to looking for a spouse, be it a wife or a husband. The central tenet of this seeking has to do with compatibility. The following discussion on this principle is adapted and quoted from a discussion on compatibility on IslamWeb, which features many similar discussions on Islam-related questions and matters.**

#### **What does it mean?**

Compatibility is defined by equality and similarity. In a Hadith (Prophetic narration), the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) said: "*Muslims are equal in their inviolability of life.*" [Abu Daawood]

Compatibility in marriage means equality and closeness between the spouses, not only in religiosity and

morality, but also in social and financial aspects. Compatibility between the spouses certainly contributes to the success of their marriage, whereas a lack of compatibility can cause aversion and lead to separation and discord.

**Compatibility includes:**

*Compatibility in religion* is considered the foundation of a marriage even constitutes a condition for its validity, according to the unanimous agreement of scholars. Therefore, it is not permissible for a woman to marry a non-Muslim by consensus. A guardian in charge of a righteous woman should not give her hand in marriage to a corrupt Muslim. Allaah The Almighty, says (what this means): *“Wicked women (are) for wicked men, and wicked men (are) for wicked women; and good women (are) for good men, and good men (are) for good women.”* [Qur’an 24:26]

Though this particular condition is not a pre-requisite for the validity of the marriage contract, it is still very important to consider. Sometimes, the guardian of a woman gives her hand in marriage to a wicked man and prefers him to a religious man because the wicked man is wealthy or has a higher status. The wicked man may have an unlawful job, thus turning away from the obedience to Allaah The Almighty, while also neglecting His Orders. Such guardians will be held accountable before Allaah The Almighty for destroying their daughters.

It was narrated on the authority of Anas that the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) said: *"Allaah will ask every caretaker about everything that was entrusted to him, whether he preserved it or wasted it, and He will ask the man about his family."* [Ibn Hibbaan]

In *Bidaayatul-Mujtahid wa Niyaayatul-Muqtasid*, Ibn Rushd, (may Allaah have mercy upon him) said, *"The Maaliki School of Fiqh states that when the father gives his virgin daughter in marriage to a man who consumes intoxicants (liquor) or a wicked man in general, the daughter has the right to prevent him from establishing conjugal relations with her. In such instances, the judge should investigate the case and separate them. The same ruling applies to the woman whose father gave her in marriage to a man whose money is ill-gotten or who frequently swears by divorce."*

*Compatibility in the family background* is a point that the majority of scholars take as to be a type of compatibility that should be taken into consideration, with the exception of Imam Malik.

*Compatibility in wealth* should also be considered. Allaah, The Almighty Says (what this means): *"Men are in charge of women by [right of] what Allaah has given one over the other and what they spend [for maintenance] from their wealth."* [Qur'an 4:34] Both the Hanafi and Hanbali scholars, as well as in one opinion of the Shaafi'i scholars, consider this point.

When it comes to *compatibility in freedom*, other than Imam Malik, both the Hanafi and Hanbali scholars consider it important.

*Compatibility in work and profession*: The Hanafi, Shaafi'i and Hanbali scholars consider this.

*Freedom from defects (intolerable defects)*: This is considered by the Maliki and Shaafi'i scholars, as well as by Ibn 'Aqeel from the Hanbali scholars.

However, the following question often asked with regards to this matter: Is compatibility a condition for the validity of marriage? Scholars hold two opinions on this matter.

**First opinion:** *Compatibility itself is not a condition for the validity of marriage.* This is a preponderant opinion as it represents the opinion of the majority of scholars, including Abu Haneefah, Malik, Ash-Shaafi'i, and Ahmad, in one of his two opinions. This was also reported on the authority of 'Umar and Ibn Mas'ood .

The following is evidence compiled from the same IslamWeb page, which supports this opinion:

The Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) gave Zaynab bint Jahsh (who was from the Banu Asad, one of the noblest Arab sub-tribes) to Zayd ibn Haarithah (who was an ex-slave). The story is mentioned in the Qur'an. Allaah The Almighty Says (what this means): "*And [remember, O Mohammad],*



*when you said to the one on whom Allaah bestowed favor and you bestowed favor, 'Keep your wife and fear Allaah,' while you concealed within yourself that which Allaah is to disclose. And you feared the people, while Allaah has more right that you fear Him. So when Zayd had no longer any need for her, we married her to you."*  
[Qur'an 33:37]

The Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) who was from the Banu Haashim gave his two daughters in marriage to 'Uthmaan ibn 'Affaan (who was from the Quraysh). The Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) said: *"Allaah selected Kinaanah from the sons of Ismaa'eel, and selected Quraysh from Kinaanah, and selected Banu Haashim from the Quraysh and He selected me from Banu Haashim."* [Muslim] Thus, the one who is from the Banu Haashim is higher in lineage than the one who is from the Quraysh. Nonetheless, the marriage was concluded and became valid.

The Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) gave Fatimah bint Qays (who was from the Quraysh) to Usaamah ibn Zayd (who was an ex-slave). When Fatimah came to consult the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) about her proposals of marriage from Mu'aawiyah and Abu Jahm, the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) said: *"As for Mu'aawiyah he is a poor man and has no property, while Abu Jahm does not put down his cane from his*

*shoulder (i.e. frequently beats his wives). So, marry Usaamah."* [Muslim]

Boasting of family lineage was a despicable habit that belonged to the pre-Islamic era. It was narrated on the authority of Abu Malik Al-Ash'ari that the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) said: *"My Ummah has four characteristics that belong to the pre-Islamic era, which they will not abandon: boasting of noble ancestries, vilifying other peoples' genealogy seeking rain by stars and wailing."* [Muslim]

Allaah The Almighty Said (what this means): *"And marry the unmarried among you and the righteous among your male slaves and female slaves. If they should be poor, Allaah will enrich them from His bounty, and Allaah is All-Encompassing and Knowing."* [Qur'an 24:32] Poverty at the time of marriage does not hinder the marriage because wealth decreed to be yours will be gained in the future.

Abu Sa'eed said that Zaynab, the wife of Ibn Mas'ood said: *"O Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him.) Today you ordered people to give charity and I had an ornament and intended to give it as charity but Ibn Mas'ood said that he and his children deserved it more than anybody else. The Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) replied: 'Ibn Mas'ood spoke the truth. Your husband and your children have more right to it than anybody else.'"* [Al-Bukhari and Muslim] This indicates that she was wealthier than Ibn

Mas'ood. Allaah knows best. Besides, the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) concluded the marriage of a poor man, who had only his *Izaar* (lower garment), to the woman who offered herself to the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him). Moreover, Bilaal married the sister of 'Abdul-Rahmaan ibn 'Awf.

Abu Hurairah said, *"Abu Hind cupped the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) in the middle of his head. The Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) said: 'O Banu Bayaadhah, marry Abu Hind (to your daughters), and ask him to marry (his daughters) to you.'"* Abu Hind, who was an ex-slave of the Banu Bayaadhah, worked as a cupper which was considered the most menial profession at that time.

'Aa'ishah said: *"I paid the price of Bareerah's manumission but her family put the condition that her inheritance would be for them. She mentioned this to the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) and he gave her the choice to leave or remain with her husband. Bareerah said, 'Even if he gave me such-and-such (money), I would not stay with him.'"* [Al-Bukhari and Muslim]

In another narration on the authority of Ibn 'Abbaas, the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) said: *"Why do you not return to him?"* She said, *'O Messenger of Allaah! Do you order me to do so?'* He said: *'No, I only intercede for him.'* She said, *'I do*

*not want him.”* [Al-Bukhari] The Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) would not intercede to ask her to return to her husband unless the marriage was valid.

**Second opinion:** *Compatibility is a condition for the validity of marriage.* This is the less preponderant opinion, which represents the view of Imam Ath-Thawri, some Hanafi scholars, along with Imam Ahmad in his well-known opinion. They mentioned a list of proofs, most of which are not authentic. Even their authentic proofs do not explicitly stipulate compatibility, nor do they prevail over the texts mentioned above.

After a deep study of the case, Islam does not stipulate compatibility between the spouses except in terms of religion and morals. Also, compatibility requires that the spouses are free from defects that hinder the fulfillment of the purposes of marriage in Islam, such as when the husband is impotent, abstinent with women, or is bisexual. Therefore, Islam did not stipulate compatibility in the family background as we mentioned earlier.

Moreover, the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) married Safiyyah bint Huyayy, who was a Jew, and also married Juwayriyyah bint Al-Harith while her family members were polytheists. The Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) gave his daughter Zaynab in marriage to Abu Al-'Aas ibn Ar-Rabee', and Al-Hasan ibn 'Ali married a non-Arab

woman from Persia who gave birth to his son ‘Ali Zayn Al-‘Aabideen .

**Additional helpful hints if you want to marry the right person:**

Please consider the following:

1. *“I’m sure they’ll change after marriage.”* Please note that a very small percentage of spouses actually change after marriage.
2. *What to choose? Character or Chemistry?* Have you heard the saying, “Character ignites the fire but chemistry keeps it burning?” Please make sure you have with both your ideal spouse, a best friend and a lover.
3. *“Say what?”* Does your conversation feel natural and spontaneous? Do you not want it to stop? Or is it a tedious task to continue?
4. *Growing together or growing apart?* Can you imagine growing old, sitting on a swing, holding hands, staring at the horizon, saying nothing and still being happy at that time?
5. *Consider this the most important point on this list...YOU!* Please note that the top point on a women’s list is LOVE, while number one on men’s list is RESPECT. So, consider the triple A and the triple R rule: Attention, Affection, and

Appreciation for women and Respect, Reassurance, and Relief for men. We will explain these later, in-sha-Allaah.

6. *Look to the future.* Make a list of what you can and cannot live without. What means more to you in the short term and long term? Discuss these plans openly.
7. *Fun or fearful?* How did you feel about the conversation? Was it sincere and honest? Were you unafraid to talk? Or was it the opposite?
8. *Looks count too!* Hygiene, appearance and the way they carry themselves are all important factors in finding the right man or woman.
9. *Consistency matters.* Look for a trend in your potential partner because good character is habitual and not just an aberrant spike.
10. *Mail order bride/groom?* Is going back home to get a spouse really the right decision for you?

There are many variables to consider when it comes to choosing the right partner. Please keep in mind that what works for you might not actually work of others. There are no right and wrong answers to what is best for you other than what Allaah, The Almighty, has decreed.

**Speaking of making decisions, let us look at this process:**

Dr. Tariq Alhabeeb, the noted Muslim psychiatrist, says that we are divided into three categories:

1. **Child** (gets pleasure from receiving)
2. **Adult** (gets pleasure from reciprocating)
3. **Parent** (gets pleasure from giving)

The best is a child to parent combination, as they bring joy to one another. Similarly, an adult-to-adult combination is also good. However, the worst is child-to-child or parent-to-parent combinations, as they are not very compatible.

So, how will I know which is my best combination? Before you look for characteristics in a potential match, you must know which category you fall into in order to make the right choice and believe me, YOU DO KNOW! Look for clues while in conversation with your potential match.

For example:

**Child category:** “Me, myself and I” will only be interested when the questions are about them. They also use the word “I” a lot. An **Adult category** individual will reciprocate in answering the question. For example, “What would you like to eat? I like this type of food, how about you?” The **Parent category** individual will

only want to know about you and it is not important what they like.

**Other issues you need to discuss before making your decision<sup>6</sup>:**

Now let us look at some practical issues that both the future husband and wife must consider or resolve if a sustainable marriage is to be attained. The following is a list of these issues as edited, adapted and quoted from a very useful piece by Huffington Post writer, Wendy Atterberry, a relationship advice columnist at DearWendy.com. I have added some of my own thoughts to her list.

**1. Deen**

According to the Hadith of Prophet Mohammad (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him), he said that a woman should be wed by four things: beauty, lineage, wealth, and religious background. The true winning attribute is the possessor of the religious background. Please note that the first three are optional and the last one is obligatory.

According to another Hadith of Prophet Mohammad, (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him), he said, "When a man comes to ask for your daughter's hand in marriage, that possesses religious background and manners, wed him otherwise it will be a great transgression upon the earth."



## **2. Children.**

Do you want children? If so, how many? If not, are you sure you know enough about that to take permanent steps to ensure you don't have them? Moreover, do you know if those steps are permissible or prohibited under Islam? If you do want them, when do you want to have your first child? Are you open to adoption or fertility treatments if you are unable to conceive naturally? How long do you want to try to conceive naturally before trying different options?

## **3. Location, location, location.**

Where do you want to put down your roots? If you do not want to settle down and would prefer to stay on the move indefinitely — make sure, your partner is on board with that idea. How would you rank location in terms of importance for your well-being? If you love where you live, what would persuade you to move—a job offer, desire to be closer to family, better schools for your kids, or the proximity to the masjid?

## **4. Outstanding debt.**

Who has some debt and what is the plan for paying it off?

## **5. Dream home.**

Do you want a mansion in the “burbs?” A cozy condo in the sky? A beach bungalow? A cabin in the woods? A macked-out tree house? A ranch in the country? You may never live in your dream home but knowing whether you and your significant other share common

long-term goals will help solidify your roles as partners in each other's lives and confirm that you are working toward the same thing.

#### **6. Bank accounts and bill sharing.**

Will you share a bank account? Keep individual accounts? Both? What bills will be paid by which accounts? Will you each put a certain percentage of your income toward shared bills? Do you have an emergency fund? What if one person is out of work or decides to stay home to raise the kids? What's your plan? Could you afford that? It's best to be content with what Allaah gives you and to live according to what's received.

#### **7. Division of household labour.**

Dishes, laundry, yada, yada, yada. Barter, negotiate and plead if you have to so you aren't stuck doing the thing you least like all the time. If you hate, hate, hate washing dishes but don't mind cooking, then suggest to your partner that you prefer meal preparation. That is, if he or she agrees to take on the dishes. This works best if the thing you hate with a passion is not the same thing your partner hates with a passion. If it is, then find a way to compromise by using your best negotiation tactics: "Okay, I'll empty the litter box and do the laundry if you wash the dishes."

#### **8. Family obligations.**

How much time do you spend with your family now?  
How much do you expect to spend with them once you

are married and potentially have children, and how much time do you expect your spouse to spend with them (and vice versa)? How do you plan to spend your holidays and what is your plan for giving both sets of family's equal time with you/your children during the major holidays? Are you the type of person who likes to vacation with your family and, if so, how often?

### **9. Vacations.**

In addition to extended family vacations, you and your partner need to discuss what other types of vacations you do or don't enjoy. If you are a Disneyland fan and your significant other hates Mickey Mouse with a passion, then this may cause some friction. If one of you only likes camping and the other prefers staying in chic boutique hotels, there is an issue. Likewise, if the workaholic in your relationship can't bear to be too far away from the office while the other would like to get as far away as possible from home, you need to talk through how you are going to compromise. On the other hand, have you considered performing Hajj and Umrah together? You can't expect to plan all your trips for the rest of your life together, but discussing preferences will help you address friction in the future.

### **10. The name game.**

What is your family name going to be? Keep in mind the Islamic implications that come with this decision. Will one spouse take the other spouse's last name? If not, what surname will you give your kids?

## **11. Career.**

How committed is each of you to your careers? Do you live to work or work to live? How will your respective careers affect family life? Where are you in terms of living a "dream career?" Do you have more schooling and apprenticing to finish? If so, what is the time frame for completing these steps toward obtaining the kind of job you hope for? What kind of personal sacrifices will you have to make to climb the career ladder of your choice?

**Finally, it comes down to the following four things that you *must* do before making your final decision:**

- 1.** Istisharah (Consulting)
- 2.** Istikhaarah (Asking Allaah)
- 3.** Azm (Determination)
- 4.** Tawakul (Putting your trust in Allaah)

**Istisharah:** It is very important to collect evidence and to do your homework before approaching one of the most important decisions in your life. Ask yourself the questions of compatibility mentioned above, and please be honest with yourself.

Ask people who know the other person's background, such as co-workers, school classmates, those at the masjid, and in any other place where your potential match has acquaintances who can help you out. Please

note that if people are giving you two thumbs up, then please proceed. If not, then do not bother. Trust the process of consultation. People who know both you and the person you are planning to marry will be able to give you insight that you cannot gather for yourself.

**Istikhaarah:** Imam an-Nawawi *rahimahu'llāh* said: “In this [the narration about the *istikhaarah* of Zaynab (*may Allaah be pleased with her*)] is a recommendation to make *istikhaarah* for anyone who has any matter concerning him, whether the goodness in the matter is clear or not.”

It may be that she made *istikhaarah* in the manner mentioned in the Sunnah, which is to offer a two-rak'ah prayer [according to one narration from other than the obligatory prayers], then to make the following dua'a:

اللَّهُمَّ إِنِّي أَسْتَخِيرُكَ بِعِلْمِكَ، وَأَسْتَقْدِرُكَ بِقُدْرَتِكَ، وَأَسْأَلُكَ مِنْ فَضْلِكَ الْعَظِيمِ، فَإِنَّكَ تَقْدِرُ وَلَا أَقْدِرُ وَتَعْلَمُ وَلَا أَعْلَمُ وَأَنْتَ عَلَامُ الْغُيُوبِ، اللَّهُمَّ إِنْ كُنْتَ تَعْلَمُ أَنَّ هَذَا الْأَمْرَ – خَيْرٌ لِي فِي دِينِي وَمَعَاشِي وَعَاجِلِ أَمْرِي وَآجِلِهِ، فَأَقْدِرْهُ لِي وَيَسِّرْهُ لِي، ثُمَّ بَارِكْ لِي فِيهِ. وَإِنْ كُنْتَ تَعْلَمُ أَنَّ هَذَا الْأَمْرَ شَرٌّ لِي فِي دِينِي وَمَعَاشِي وَعَاجِلِ أَمْرِي وَآجِلِهِ، فَاصْرِفْهُ عَنِّي وَاصْرِفْنِي عَنْهُ، وَاقْدِرْ لِي الْخَيْرَ حَيْثُ كَانَ ثُمَّ أَرْضِنِي بِهِ. قَالَ: وَيُسَمَّى حَاجَتَهُ.

Translation: “O Allaah, I seek Your help in finding the best course of action (in this matter) by invoking Your knowledge; I ask You to empower me, and I beseech Your favour. You alone have the absolute power, while I have no power. You alone know it all, while I do not. You are the One who knows the hidden mysteries. O

Allaah, if You know this thing (I am embarking on) [here mention your case] is good for me in my religion, worldly life, and my ultimate destiny. Then facilitate it for me, and then bless me in my action. If, on the other hand, you know this thing is detrimental for me in my religion, worldly life and ultimate destiny turn it away from me and decree what is good for me, wherever it may be and make me content with it.” [Based on the Hadith reported by Al-Bukhari, Abu Dawud, An-Nasai and others]

### **Signs to look for:**

Please note that things will get either easier or more difficult after praying Istikhaarah.

### **Here are some things not to do when considering a potential match for marriage:**

- Depend on your dreams: your subconscious mind stores information for three to four days.
- Open the Qur'an to a random page and place your finger on a random spot in order to seek a result.
- Do istikhaarah on a preconceived idea or a predetermined decision.
- Whatever you do, please do not go against Istikhaarah.
- Istikhaarah must be done for 7 days.

- Let somebody else do Istikhaarah on your behalf.
- Do Istikhaarah for multiple purposes.

Please keep doing Istikhaarah until you get a solid RED or a solid GREEN light.

**Azm:** After you have done your istisharah and istikhaarah, you should act accordingly. However, make sure that you get a clear sign and that you do not have a preconceived idea about the matter.

**Tawakul:** If everything has fallen into place and you have committed yourself in good faith, then you should put your trust in Allaah and not hesitate.

### **Chapter Three: The Concept of Engagement in Islam<sup>7</sup>**

So now, things are looking good and you want to ask for her hand in marriage but you want to get to know each other a little more before you perform the nikkah. However, you have questions about the concept of engagement in Islam.

Let us learn from Sheikh Al-Munajjid as presented on IslamQA. The following is an adaptation and edited quotation from the answers that the Sheikh gives on the IslamQA webpage.

Engagement, according to Shariah, means that the man asks the woman to marry him. The view of the scholars is that engagement is prescribed for one who wants to get married. Allaah says (interpretation of the meaning):

*“And there is no sin on you if you make a hint of betrothal...”* [Al-Baqarah 2:235]

It was narrated that the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) got engaged to ‘Aa’ishah. [Al-Bukhari, *al-Nikkah*, 4793]

In *al-Sahih*, it also states that the Messenger (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) got engaged to Hafsa. [Al-Bukhari, *al-Nikkah*, 4830]



The Messenger of Allaah (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) encouraged the one who wants to get engaged to look at the woman to whom he wishes to propose. According to the Hadith, “When any one of you proposes marriage to a woman, if he can look at her so it will encourage him to go ahead and marry her, then let him do so.” [Abu Dawood, *al-Nikkah*, 2082; classed as hasan by al-Albaani in *Sahih Abi Dawood*, 1832].

However, in Islamic Shariah, there are no specific practices that must be followed with regard to the engagement. What some Muslims do after announcing the engagement is to have a party to celebrate the occasion and to exchange gifts. This comes under the heading of customs, which are permissible in principle. None of them are haram except for those which the Shariah indicates to be haram. These include the exchange of rings between the engaged couple, a custom that is known in Arabic as “dublah.” This custom goes against Shariah for the following reasons:

1. Some people think that these rings increase the love between the spouses and have an effect on their relationship. This is an ignorant (jaahili) belief and is an attachment to something for which there is no basis in Shariah, and it does not make sense.
2. This custom involves imitating the non-Muslims. It is not a Muslim custom at all. The Messenger (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) warned us against such

imitation when he said, “You will inevitably follow the paths of those who came before you, hand span by hand span, cubit by cubit, until even if they entered the hole of a lizard, you will follow them.” We said, “O Messenger of Allaah, (do you mean) the Jews and Christians?” He said, “Who else?” [Narrated by Al-Bukhari, *al-l’tisaam bi’l-Kitaab wa’l-Sunnah*, 6889; Muslim, *al-’Ilm*, 6723].

The Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) also said: “Whoever imitates a people is one of them.” [Narrated by Abu Dawood, *al-Libaas*, 4031; classed as Sahih by al-Albaani in *Sahih Abi Dawood*, 3401].

3. This engagement usually takes place before the ‘aqd (marriage contract), in which case it is not permissible for the man to put the ring on his fiancée’s hand himself because she is still a stranger (or non-mahram) to him and has yet to actually become his wife.

Finally, we will quote the words of Shaikh Ibn ‘Uthaymeen (may Allaah have mercy on him) on this matter:

“‘Dublah’ is a word that refers to the engagement ring. In principle, there is nothing wrong with rings (i.e., they are permissible) unless they are accompanied by certain beliefs, like when the man and/or woman writes his/her name on the rings that they give to one another, believing that this will secure the bond between them.

In this case, the ‘dublah’ or engagement ring is haram because it represents an attachment to something for which there is no basis in Shariah and which does not make sense. Similarly, it is not permissible for the man to put the ring on the woman’s hand himself because she is not yet his wife. She is still a stranger (or non-mahram) as the marriage contract has yet to be completed.”

Therefore, what rights do I have over my fiancé, you may ask?

The answer is...NOTHING.

Actually, maybe one thing: no other man can come and ask for her hand in marriage while you are both making a decision. And the same goes for you.

Please do not prolong the engagement period, as it may be difficult to keep the situation halaal. If two people are left alone for long periods, it can result in sisters becoming pregnant out of wedlock. I have seen enough cases like this in my career.

Please note that being alone (khalwah) is not permitted during the engagement period. This also applies to all kinds of communications, such as cellphones or online chatting. However, we recommend that you communicate with the guardian (or wali) via email in order to keep things halaal, in-sha-Allaah.

## **Chapter Four: The Wedding<sup>8</sup>**

Sometimes we think of and treat weddings as if they are fashion shows where we can show off our wardrobe.

You would not be caught dead wearing the same dress twice or play the convertible hijab game, where you take the scarf off right after the Qur'an recitation.

So, let us learn from Islamic etiquette when it comes to weddings. The following sections are adapted and quoted from two pages of the very useful Islamic Etiquette website, which features some great discussion and explication of this and related topics.

### **The Manner of Attending Weddings**

When you are invited to a wedding, attend with the intention that you are taking part in a blessed event, one that is delightful and approved in the Shariah. Rasulullah (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) commanded us to attend such occasions. Dress appropriately within the framework of Shariah. The Sahabah (may Allaah be pleased with them) used to dress properly when they visited each other. When initiating or sharing in a discussion, make sure your conversation fits the happy occasion. Do not discuss any unpleasant subject matter that will depress or upset those who are present. A believer should be wise and considerate.

It is recommended that you congratulate the bride and groom by reciting the dua'a of Rasulullah (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him):

بَارَكَ اللَّهُ لَكَ وَبَارَكَ عَلَيْكَ وَجَمَعَ بَيْنَكُمَا فِي خَيْرٍ

*BarakAllaahu laka wa baaraka 'alaika wa jama'a  
bainakuma fi khair*

Translation: May Allaah bless you, bless your counterpart and may Allaah tie your union with virtue. (Sunan Abi Dawud, Sunan Tirmidhi, Sunan Ibn Majah and Al-Hakim)

Do not mistakenly use the common phrase, "with comfort and children," because this was the expression used by the people of ignorance (*jahiliyah*). Rasulullah (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) has prohibited it and Allaah has replaced it with the prayer of Rasulullah (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) as mentioned above.

Sayyidah 'Aisha (may Allaah be pleased with her) said, "When Rasulullah (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) married me, my mother led me into the house where the women of the Ansar were seated. They congratulated me by saying,

عَلَى الْخَيْرِ وَالْبَرَكَاتِ، وَعَلَى خَيْرِ طَائِرٍ

"May you have all the good, all the blessings and the best of luck." [Sahih Bukhari]

Islam permits women to celebrate a wedding by singing tasteful songs as accompanied by the beating of the duf drum. Such poems and songs should not promote lust, lewd desires or sin. Instead, the women attendees should sing delightful and decent songs to express their happiness and joy regarding the marriage.

Sayyidah ‘Aisha (may Allaah be pleased with her) said, “A bride was led to her Ansari husband. Rasulullah (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) said, ‘O ‘Aisha! Do you not have any items of entertainment? The Ansar love to be entertained.’” [Sahih Al-Bukhari]. Rasulullah (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) was referring to singing and the beating of the duf drum.

Hafidh Ibn Hajar (may Allaah be pleased with him) in his book, *Fathul Bári*, states that in one narration of Tabarani, Sayyidah ‘Aisha (may Allaah be pleased with her) recalled that the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) asked, “*Why did you not send with her (the bride) a girl to sing with the duff?*” I enquired, “*What should she sing?*” He answered: “*We are visiting you, if you greet us, we will greet you, for your gold, bright and red, brought the Bride to your valley and it is your brown and tanned wheat that has made your virgins charming.*”

Wedding song should thus have delightful and decent meanings such as the one mentioned above. Songs of lust, passion, and immorality are strictly prohibited.

## **Additional Manners of Attending a Wedding**

If invited to a marriage ceremony or a wedding celebration, you should accept the invitation *unless it includes prohibited acts*. Attending a wedding is part of the noble Sunnah of Rasulullah (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him). Islam regards marriage as an act of worship and obedience to Allaah. For this, the jurists have mentioned that *it is preferable (mustahab) to contract the marriage in the masjid*.

This is based on a Hadith reported by Imam Tirmidhi and Imam Ibn Majah (may Allaah be pleased with him):  
“Publicise the marriage, execute it in the masjid and celebrate it with the duff.”

Another Hadith by Imam Ahmad, Al-Hakim and others supports the first part of the former Hadith:

“Publicise the marriage.”

It is also supported by a third Hadith reported by Imams Ahmad, At-Tirmidhi, An-Nasai and Ibn Majah (may Allaah be pleased with him):

“The difference between a legitimate (halal) marriage and illegitimate (haram) relationship is the presence of voices and the duff.”

The Hadith mentioned above is explained by our ‘ulema as follows:

By “voice” is meant that the nikkah should be announced and mentioned to the people. Voice also refers to the singing of legitimate anashid (Islamic songs).

There is no dispute among Muslim scholars that at a wedding celebration, Rasulullah (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) allowed women to use the duf drum. The most valid opinion among scholars is that men can also use the drum in order to publicise the marriage, thus making it known far and wide. The noble Islamic purpose of such publicity is to distinguish between an evil/illicit relationship and a pure, Islamic/halal marriage. To this effect, it is useful to note yet again that the actual purpose of the duf drum was not mere entertainment, but to publicise the marriage to a wide audience.

Attending a wedding is one of the rights of brotherhood among Muslims. It fulfills the requirement of publicity and reinforces the testimony of marriage. It also gives you a chance to join your brethren in this pious act by which they complete half of Islam, which leaves only the second half for them to uphold on their own. Attending a wedding also honours the husband and wife by having the relatives, friends and other pious people share in their happiness. It blesses them with guests who pray to Allaah for their righteousness, success, affluence, and prosperity.



## **Chapter Five: The Wedding Night<sup>9</sup>**

After giving marriage advice to a just-married couple during the nikkah ceremony, I usually get some brother coming up to me to say something to the effect of, “Now you tell me?! I need to try this again!” Well, nice try...

Let us now learn from the noted scholar, Dr. Saalih Al-Sadlaan, on the etiquette of the wedding night and the consummation of marriage.

The following aspects are recommended when the man is about to consummate the marriage on the first wedding night (and later in marital life as well). They are adapted and quoted from the always useful IslamWeb webpage. In this case, I have edited the advice according to my own thoughts and conclusions on the matter as well:

1. He should make his wife feel relaxed and comfortable by presenting her with something to drink, with sweets or with something similar. This is based on what is authentically narrated by Imam Ahmad from the Hadith of Asmaa bint Yazeed ibn al-Sakin, who said: “I prepared and beautified Aisha (for the Messenger of Allaah). Then he came and I called him to see her in all her beauty. He came and sat next to her. He was brought a large cup of milk. He drank some and then handed it to her. She lowered her head and was shy. Asmaa then said: I rebuked her and told her to take it (from the

hand of the Messenger of Allaah). She took it and drank some."

2. He should put his hand on her head and pray for her. The evidence for this is the authentic Hadith in which the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) said, "If one of you marries a woman, he should take her by her forelock, mention Allaah's name (saying, 'In the name of Allaah') and pray for blessings by saying, *'O Allaah, I ask you for her good and the good of what you have dispositioned her toward and I seek refuge from her evil and the evil you have dispositioned her toward'*".

3. He should pray two rakats with her. This has been narrated by some of the early scholars. For instance, there is the Hadith of Abu Saeed, who said, "I invited a number of the Companions of the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) for my marriage...they taught me by saying, 'When your wife comes to you, pray two rakats and then ask for the good of what has come to you and seek refuge from its evil. Then, it is your affair and your wife's affair.'"

4. It is recommended for him, before he comes to her, to purify his mouth and prevent it from having an unpleasant smell. The same is true with respect to her. They can use a toothbrush and toothpaste. This will make it easier for them to have good relations and to come closer together. This aspect is alluded to in the

Hadith of Shuraih ibn Haani who said, "I asked Aisha what the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) would begin with when he entered her house and she said, 'The tooth stick.'"

5. When the man desires to have intercourse with her, he should say, "In the name of Allaah, O Allaah, ward off Satan from us and ward off from Satan what you grant us." This has many benefits, including what the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) explicitly stated at the end of that Hadith, "Then if Allaah decrees that they should have a child, Satan will never harm him."

6. The husband may come to his wife and have sexual intercourse with her in any manner he wishes and in any position he likes as long as it is through the woman's sexual organ. This is proven by what Imam Muslim recorded in his Sahih on the authority of Jaabir, who said: "The Jews would say that if a man came to his wife from behind but through the vagina, the child would be cross-eyed. Then the verse was revealed, 'Your wives are a tilth for you, so go into your tilth when and how you please.'" (Al-Baqarah 223). Al-Zuhri added in his narration, "If you wish, from in front [on top] and if you wish other than from in front but it must always be through [the] one opening."

In a narration recorded by al-Tirmidhi, ibn Abbaas stated, "From the front and from the back but stay

away from the anus and (while the woman is) menstruating." In a narration recorded by Abu Dawood, ibn Umar stated in explaining the aforementioned verse, "From in front, from behind if lying on the back, meaning through the place of the delivery of the child."

Muslim men and women must be very cautious about going against this command, as a strong warning and real threat has come concerning this matter. The Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) said, "Whoever has intercourse with a menstruating woman or with a woman through the anus has committed disbelief in what has been revealed to Mohammad." Ibn Abbaas was asked about a man who had intercourse through the anus of a woman and he said, "That is kufr (disbelief)."

Ibn al-Qayyim noted a number of evils associated with the act of sodomy. These include health and psychological effects upon both the man and the woman. It is an act that is hated naturally and by sound tastes.

7. It is recommended for the husband to have foreplay with his wife before sexual intercourse.

8. If the man fulfills his desire with his wife, he should not leave her until she also fulfills her desire. This is more fitting to nurture love and good feelings between them.

9. If he finds the strength to repeat the act of sexual intercourse after he has finished, he should first make ablution as this is part of the Sunnah. The Messenger of Allaah) said, "If one of you has gone to his wife [and had sexual intercourse] and he wishes to repeat the act, he should [first] make ablution."

10. When the woman's cycle comes to an end, she should clean up any traces of blood with a piece of cotton containing some musk or some perfume in order to remove any foul smell. This is an Islamic behaviour, yet very few women pay attention to it. It is pointed out in the Hadith where a woman asked the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) about ghusl (the complete bathing after menstruation), to which he replied, "Take some cotton with musk on it and purify yourself with it."

11. It is allowed for the husband, after he has had sexual intercourse with his wife, to sleep in the same clothes in which they had sexual intercourse. The same is true for the wife. However, this is after they have removed any bothersome substance with a rag [or tissue] and take a shower. They may even pray in such clothing if they wish.

Aisha said, "If a woman is intelligent, she should have a rag with her. If her husband has sexual intercourse with her, she gives it to him to wipe himself off and then she

wipes herself off. Then they can pray in their clothing as long as no sexual fluid had come upon it."

Muawiyah ibn Abu Sufyaan (may Allaah be pleased with him) asked Umm Habeebah (his sister and one of the wives of the Prophet, peace and blessing of Allaah be upon him), "Would the Messenger of Allaah pray in the same clothing in which he had sexual intercourse with you?" She said, "Yes, if he did not see anything harmful [impure] on it."

12. It is allowed for him to see her private parts as well as for her to see his. This is based on the Hadith in which Aisha said, "I used to wash myself from one bowl with the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) while we were in a state of sexual defilement."

13. The believer is obliged to lower his gaze. If he happens to see a woman, he should turn his eyes away. If he experiences a feeling of temptation due to that sight, then he should go to his wife in order to calm his desires. This is based on the Hadith of Jaabir ibn Abdullah (may Allaah be pleased with him) who said that the Messenger of Allaah, who said, "If one of you is very pleased by a woman and something occurs in his heart, he should proceed to his wife and have intercourse with her as that will repel what is in his soul." In another narration from Sunan Al-Tirmidhi, it states that "He should go to his wife for she has what is similar to what the other woman has."

14. When a man has intercourse with his wife, he will be rewarded for that act. The Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) stated, "In having intercourse [with your wife] there is an act of charity [for which he shall be rewarded]." The people said, "O Messenger of Allaah, one of us fulfills his desires and he will be rewarded for that!" He replied, "Do you not see that if he fulfills it in a forbidden way, then he will face its burden? In the same way if he fulfills it in a permissible way, he shall have a reward."

Thus, sexual intercourse becomes an act of worship for the man who intends to fulfill the rights of his wife and to treat her in a good manner as Allaah has ordered him to. It can lead to him seeking a pious child, to keeping himself chaste, to keeping his wife chaste, and to keep them from looking at, thinking about, or considering what is forbidden.

15. It is not allowed for either the man or the woman to spread the secrets of their sexual relations about or to talk about them among other men or women. The evidence for this is narrated by Abu Saeed al-Khudri from the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) who said, "Certainly among the people with the most evil position with Allaah on the Day of Resurrection is a man who satisfies himself with his wife and the woman who satisfies herself with him and then they spread their private relations."

Similarly, Asmaa bint Yazeed said, "I was with the Messenger of Allaah and the men and women were sitting. He then said, 'Perhaps a man says what he has done with his wife and perhaps a woman informs others about what she did with her husband.' The people remained silent. Then I said, 'By Allaah, it is so, O Messenger of Allaah. They [the women] do it and they [the man] do it.' He said, 'Do not do so for that is similar to a devil meeting another devil on the road and he has intercourse with her while the people are watching.'"

16. It is recommended for him to have intercourse with her on Friday before the prayer, based on the Hadith, "For whoever 'makes his wife make ghusl' and he himself makes ghusl on Friday, leaves early and timely, walks and does not ride, sits close to the mosque and listens without doing anything that diverts his attention, he will have for every step he takes the reward of a year's worth of fasting and praying at night." Ibn Khuzaimah stated that the first portion of that Hadith means that when a person has sexual intercourse with his wife, he makes it obligatory upon her and him to make ghusl.

17. When travelling away from home, the husband should not return to his wife unexpectedly. Instead, he should tell her when he is planning to return. The benefit of this behaviour is that the wife may prepare for her husband's return by applying make-up and



perfume, etc. It is sanctioned for him to have sexual intercourse with his wife after he returns from a trip, especially if he has been gone for a long time.

The following Hadith alludes to the matters that we have just mentioned: Jaabir ibn Abdullah narrated that the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) said, "If one of you is gone for a long time, he should not return unexpectedly to his wife at night." The Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) also said, "If one of you returns at night, he should not come to his wife unexpectedly as she may need time to remove her pubic hairs and tidy her hair by combing it."

Jaabir also said, "The Messenger of Allaah forbade a man to return expectedly at night to his wife to find something that will arouse his suspicion concerning the wives or coming across some of their faults."

Ibn Hajar explained the above-mentioned Hadith: the one who rushes upon his household [unexpectedly] after a long absence will usually come across some displeasing aspects. He may find his wife unprepared with respect to being beautified in a way that is desired of a woman and that may cause some estrangement between them. He may dislike having contact with her while she is in that state.

19. The wife must try to make herself attractive to her

husband by beautifying herself, so that he may want to be with her. One of the wives of the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) said to him, "O Messenger of Allaah, if a woman does not beautify herself for her husband, she will not be important to him." The last part means she will become a burden upon him and he will not care to look at her.

It is authentically reported that Aisha would beautify herself for the Prophet (peace and blessing of Allaah be upon him). The Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) came upon her once and she had two silver rings. He said, "What is this, O Aisha?" She replied, "I made them in order [to wear them] to beautify myself for you, O Messenger of Allaah."

## **Chapter Six: Men from Makkah and Women from Madinah**

I have always thought that the spouse who is both a best friend and a lover makes the best combination for both one's worldly and eternal life. However, here are some compiled insights from the experts on WebMD, the popular online health forum of physicians, from which we can all learn.

Let us start by looking at some practical, everyday tips and insights. The following sections are taken from the always useful WebMD webpage, where a lot of good stuff can be found on this and related matters. I have edited the points according to an Islamic context.

### **Secrets about Men<sup>10</sup>:**

#### **Men Will Talk About Feelings**

Was your husband raised as a traditional, stoic, man's man? If so, let us walk through 18 relationship secrets, regarding gender roles. Secret No. 1: It may be easier for your husband to talk about feelings indirectly. Ask what he would do during a romantic weekend or what he thought the first time he met you. His answers will reveal how he feels and bring you closer.

#### **Men Say 'I Love You' With Actions**

Some men prefer to show their feelings through actions rather than words. Your husband may say "I love you"

by fixing things around the house, tidying up the yard or even taking out the trash; anything that makes your world a better place.

### **Men Take Commitment Seriously**

Men have a reputation of being afraid to commit. However, evidence suggests men take marriage seriously. They may take longer to commit because they want to make sure they are onboard for good. In a survey of currently married men, 90% said they would marry the same woman again.

### **He Really Is Listening**

When you are listening to someone, you probably chime in with a "yes" or "I see" every now and then. It is your way of saying, "I'm listening." But some men do not do this. Just because a man is not saying anything does not mean he is not listening. He may prefer to listen quietly and think about what you are saying.

### **Shared Activities Form Bonds**

Men strengthen their relationships with their partners by doing things together rather than by sharing thoughts or feelings. For many men, activities like sports and sex make them feel closer to their partner.

## **Men Need Time for Themselves**

While shared activities are important, men also need time for themselves. Whether your husband enjoys golf, gardening or working out at the gym, encourage him to pursue his hobbies, while you make time for your own. You may both have a common hobby that you enjoy doing together as well. When both partners have space to nurture their individuality, they have more to give to each other.

## **Men Learn From Their Fathers**

If you want to know how a man will act in a relationship, get to know his dad. How the father is with his mother and how the father relates to her can predict how that man will relate to his wife.

## **Men Let Go Faster Than Women**

Women tend to remember negative experiences longer and may have lingering feelings of stress, anxiety or sadness. In contrast, men are less likely to dwell on unpleasant events and tend to move on more quickly. So, while you may still want to talk about last night's argument, your husband may have already forgotten about it.

## **Men Don't Pick Up on Subtle Cues**

Men are more likely to miss subtle signals like tone of voice or facial expressions and they are especially likely

to miss sadness on a woman's face. If you want to make sure your husband gets the message, be direct.

### **Men Respond to Appreciation**

Showing appreciation to your husband can make a big difference in the way he acts. Take parenting: Studies show that fathers are more involved in caregiving when their wives value their involvement and see them as competent.

### **Men Think About Sex...A Lot**

Ok, so maybe this one is no secret. Most men under age 60 think about sex at least once a day, compared with only a quarter of women. And that is not all. Men fantasize about sex nearly twice as often as women do and their fantasies are much more varied.

### **Men Find Sex Significant**

It is a myth that most men think sex is just sex. For many, sex is a very important act between two committed spouses. And just like most women, men find sexual intimacy to be more satisfying within a committed relationship. One reason is that long-term partners know how to please one another better.

### **He Likes It When You Initiate Sex**

Most husbands feel as though they are the ones who always initiate sex. But they also like to be pursued and wish their partner would take the lead more often. Do

not be shy about letting your husband know you are in the mood. Initiating sex some of the time may lead to a higher level of satisfaction for both of you.

### **Men Aren't Always Up for Sex**

Men, too many women's surprise, are not always in the mood for sex. Just like women, men are often stressed by the demands of work, family, and paying the bills and stress is a big libido crusher. When a husband says, "not tonight," it does not mean he has lost interest in you. He just means he does not want to have sex right then.

### **Men Like Pleasing Their Wives**

Your pleasure is important to your husband. But he will not know what you want unless you tell him. Too many women feel uncomfortable talking about what they like and do not like. If you can tell him clearly in a way that does not bruise his ego, he will listen. He knows he will feel good if you feel good.

### **Men Get Performance Anxiety**

Most men get performance anxiety on occasion, especially as they age. Your husband may worry about his body, technique, and stamina. If you can help him learn to relax and stay focused on the pleasures of the moment, sex will become less stressful.

## **Men May Stray When Needs Aren't Met**

If a man does not feel loved and appreciated in his relationship, he may turn elsewhere for satisfaction. For one man, that may mean burying himself in work. Another may develop a fixation on sports or video games or any other activity. To avoid this, partners need to work together to meet each other's needs.

## **He is Vested in You**

Most men realize there is a lot to lose if a long-term relationship goes sour... not just each other's company but also the entire life you have built together. If you are willing to work to strengthen your marriage, chances are your husband will be willing, too.

## **Secrets about Women<sup>11</sup>:**

### **A Caring Husband Is a Hot Husband**

What do women want? Women appreciate a husband with a sensitive side, especially when they are upset. Put your arms around her and hand her a tissue. Nurturing is a powerful way to connect. Do not feel the need to have answers to her problems, most of the time women just want to be heard and acknowledged.

### **Chivalry Still Has a Place**

When it comes to romance, many women like men to take a traditionally masculine role. She is perfectly capable of pulling out her own chair or opening a door



but she will be pleasantly surprised when you act like a gentleman through small chivalrous acts.

### **Dress to Impress**

Styles come and go but a man's attention to his grooming and clothing is timeless. Just like men are attracted to well dressed, well-groomed women, women are the same. If you want her eyes on you, then make sure you give her something good to look at. Maintain your hygiene and dress well for her. Especially pay attention to her favorite color on you or her favorite style of clothing. When you dress to make her happy, you will see an instant attraction.

### **Don't Hide Your Flaws**

Nothing captures a woman's heart quite like a good man who wants to be a better man. Women love a man who has a sense of personal growth and knows how to achieve his goals. She likes it when her husband recognizes a flaw -- a short temper, for example, or a regularly sullen mood after work -- and loves it when he makes an effort to address it.

### **Don't Try to Fix Her World**

When something is bothering her, she wants your ear, not your advice. Men feel the need to solve problems because they are solution-oriented, but your wife doesn't always need you to "fix it", sometimes she's only looking to vent, and the best thing you can do is

allow her to blow off some steam. If you think she needs more, then simply ask, “How can I help?”

### **Nodding Is Not Enough**

Listening is important but she also wants to know that she is being heard. Nodding along will not cut it. When she pauses, she is giving you a cue to respond in a compassionate, caring way. If she tells you that she is upset because she is having a hard day, acknowledge what she said and validate her. For example, “I know you’re having a rough day, there’s been a lot going on and I completely understand why you feel this way.” And remember to resist the urge to offer solutions.

### **Women like the Slow Lane**

Men often want to take the quickest path to sex. But many women prefer the scenic route. They want to feel connected and wanted. They want to be romanced. That means time, talking and touching... in other words, foreplay. If you want her to get in the mood, you are going to have to make some effort to create the mood.

### **Learn What She Wants in Bed**

Women like to talk to about what is going on in bed and they want to please their husband. When you are enjoying yourself, be vocal about it, tell her how good it feels. Ask her what she likes. Keep communication open in sex. If you want to change things up, be sure to ask

for what you want in a positive and validating way. "I would really love it if you....[fill in the blanks]."

### **Performance Anxiety Is Shared**

When you have an off night and cannot perform, she feels bad too. She might worry that she no longer turns you on and she will want assurance about that not being true. She will want to talk about what is going on and how it can be worked through, especially if it is a recurring problem.

### **Mirroring Is a Barometer of Love**

Remember the saying "imitation is the highest form of flattery?" A woman often conveys how she feels about you by mirroring your moods and moves. She may order a meal that pairs with yours, wear your favourite color or smile or cross her arms when you do. Mimicking is her way of putting you at ease and letting you know she is charmed.

### **Say It, Again and Again**

Women like to be told they look nice and they like a man who notices them without being told. When she is wearing a sexy new dress (at home, of course!), for example, she will give you major points for saying how hot she looks, especially if you mention the dress before she does. If she is looking particularly attractive or if she has a new hairstyle or if she is looking fit -- let her hear about it.

### **Do not Fear the Relationship Talk**

When your woman wants to talk about the relationship, it does not mean you did something wrong (well, not necessarily). Women like to talk about what is going right, what is going wrong or simply what is going on. This is a good thing. An honest, wide-ranging talk can bring the two of you closer.

### **Look Your Partner in the Eye**

You may feel more comfortable sitting side by side but many women prefer face time -- and we do not mean the latest mobile video chat technology. Looking directly at her will give you a better idea of her emotional response, and it will deepen the conversation and make her feel secure.

### **Romance Is Simple; Keep It Coming**

Romance is something she will always want, whether you have been together two months or 20 years. Flowers, an intimate dinner, a few lines of love poetry, don't worry, they don't have to be your own. It might sound like a cliché, but most women appreciate such simple romantic gestures and often show their appreciation after the lights go down.

### **Additional insights from Dr. Jasim Almotawi'a:**

**Secret #1: Men prove themselves from what they produce**

This is one of the most important secrets about spouses that the couple should be aware of. A lot of you may disagree with me on this secret, and I do not mind, as long as it starts a conversation between couples. Once a couple has such discussions, communication begins. Why does a man get mad when his wife says, “You don’t love me anymore?” Men will say, “I told you I love you once and if anything changes, I’ll let you know.” So if your husband gives you a gift, he is saying, “I la la la...love you.”

### **Secret #2: Men are physically based and women are emotionally based**

Men will learn to love the woman they are attracted to and women will learn to be attracted to the man they love.

### **Secret #3: Have a common hobby between spouses**

Remember, we are looking to be best friends, and this is one way to foster such a relationship.

### **Secret #4: Women love men who listen**

Yeah, good luck with that...

If a woman has a problem at work, she relies on her husband to listen to her. As soon as she has the chance, you will find her talking to him because she needs his listening ear and feedback.

**Secret #5: Men use the left side of the brain and women use the right side of the brain**

<b>The brain's left side</b>	<b>The brain's right side</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• analysing information</li><li>• putting things in a logical order</li><li>• numbers</li><li>• planning and decision making.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• imagination and passion</li><li>• creativity and consistency</li><li>• taste and tunes, which are often more utilised by women.</li></ul>

**Secret #6: Women look at specifics while men look at the general picture**

Have you ever wondered what goes through the man's mind when he asks his wife, "Do we have food?" The woman usually answers, "Yes, we have two whole chickens, five pounds of beef, and seven pieces of fish." Meanwhile, the man is simply looking for a simple yes or no answer. Have you ever asked yourself why? How do we use this information to our benefit?

Sisters: when you speak to your husband, please DO NOT go into details, just say what he needs to know. Otherwise, you will lose him.

Brothers: when you speak to your wife, please describe her beauty, or how delicious her food is, in detail.

## **Chapter Seven: Let's Do the Right Thing<sup>12</sup>**

Brothers, do you know about the miracle that is also the best thing in life—that is, the pleasure and treasure of life?

It is a righteous wife!

Sisters, all of us strive until the last day to go to Paradise by the mercy of Allaah. Do you know who your key to Paradise is?

A righteous husband!

Before we begin the section of rights, duties, and responsibilities, we must raise a banner:

IF YOU INSIST ON DISOBEYING ALLAAH WHEN  
TREATING ME, THEN I WILL STILL INSIST ON OBEYING  
ALLAAH IN MY TREATMENT OF YOU.

You will not be held accountable in front of Allaah based on how he/she treated you, but you will be held accountable in front of Allaah for how you treated him/her.

Islam has enjoined upon the husband duties towards his wife and vice versa, and among these duties is some that are shared by both.

We will mention – by the help of Allaah – some of the texts of the Qur'an and the Sunnah that have to do with the duties of the spouses towards one another, quoting



also from the commentaries and views of the scholars. The following are sections adapted, edited, and quoted from the Al-Kauthar Institute's "Home Sweet Home" course which I teach and which features a discussion on this issue.

### **Duties and rights of spouses toward each other**

Now that you have learned how to decipher the others' language, you must also realize that you have to live together as well. Since this is not a courtroom, we will not concentrate on The matter of rights. Rather, we must ask, "What are my duties?"

If I leave with nothing but this banner, it would suffice: "If you insist but to disobey Allaah in treating me, I'll insist but to obey Allaah in treating you." Indeed, you will not be held accountable in front of Allaah on Judgement Day about how others treat you, but how you treated others.

### **The Husband's Duties toward His Wife**

#### **Financial Duties**

##### **a. The Bridal money (Mahr)**

Definition: Technically, the mahr is the money to which the wife is entitled from her husband when the marriage contract is completed or when the marriage is consummated.

It is a right which the man is obliged to pay to the woman. Please do not put culture before religion and follow blindly when it contradicts the commands of Allaah in the Qur'an and the authentic Sunnah.

“And give the women [upon marriage] their [bridal] gifts graciously. However, if they give up willingly to you anything of it, then take it in satisfaction and ease.”  
(Surat al-Nisā', 4:4)

The prescription of the mahr demonstrates the seriousness and importance of the marriage contract, and is a token of respect and honour to the woman.

Is not a condition or essential part of the marriage-contract, according to the majority of fuqahaa' (scholars); rather, it is one of the *consequences* of the contract.

If the marriage-contract is done without any mention of the mahr, it is still valid, according to the consensus of the majority of scholars, because Allaah (SWT) says:

“There is no blame upon you if you divorce women you have not touched nor specified for them an obligation. But give them [a gift of] compensation - the wealthy according to his capability and the poor according to his capability - a provision according to what is acceptable, a duty upon the doers of good.” (Surat al-Baqarah, 2:236)

The fact that divorce is permitted before consummation of the marriage or before stipulating the mahr indicates that it is permissible not to stipulate the mahr in the marriage contract.

If the mahr is stipulated, it becomes obligatory upon the husband; if it is not stipulated, then he must give the mahr that is given to women of similar status to his wife.

#### b. Spending Allowance

The scholars of Islam agree: it is obligatory for the husband to spend on his wife, on the condition that her duties are fulfilled.

What is meant by spending is providing what the wife needs for food and accommodation. She has the right to these things even if she is rich because Allaah (SWT) says:

“Upon the father is the mothers' provision and their clothing according to what is acceptable.” (Surat al-Baqarah, 2:233)

#### c. Accommodation

This is also one of the husband's duties, which means that he should prepare for her accommodation according to his means and ability. Allaah says:

“Lodge them [in a section] of where you dwell out of your means ...” (Surat al-Ṭalāq, 65:6).

## Non-Financial Duties

### a. Good treatment

The husband must have a good attitude towards his wife and be kind to her, and to offer her everything that may soften her heart towards him, because Allaah (SWT) says:

“And live with them honourably.” (Surat al-Nisā’, 4:19)

“And due to the wives is similar to what is expected of them, according to what is reasonable.” (Surat al-Baqarah, 2:228)

### b. Beautification

It was narrated that Abd Allaah Ibn ‘Abbās used to beautify himself to his wife. He used to say, “I like to beautify myself for my wife, as I like her to beautify herself to me.” Therefore, if you want her to look and smell good for you, you had better do the same for her.

### c. Acquiring knowledge

Acquiring knowledge in Islam is an obligation upon everyone. However, it is the husband’s duty to teach his wife her religious affairs including establishing prayer or at least to provide her with the opportunity to acquire knowledge. On the other hand, if the wife is more knowledgeable than the husband, the opposite is true.

“O you who have believed, protect yourselves and your families from a Fire whose fuel is people and stones.”  
(Surat al-Taḥrīm, 66:6)

Prophet Mohammad said: “Do not prohibit the female slaves of Allaah to visit the Masajid of Allaah, and their homes are better for them.” (Ahmad, Abu Dawud)

#### d. Kindness

It was narrated that Abu Hurairah: “The Messenger of Allaah (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) said: ‘Be kind to women.’ (Narrated by Al-Bukhari; Muslim)

Here are some examples of the kind treatment of the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) towards his wives – for he is the best example:

1. Menses: It was narrated from Zaynab bint Abi Salamah that Umm Salamah said: “I got my menses when I was lying with the Prophet (pbuh) under a single woollen sheet. I slipped away and put on the clothes I usually wore for menstruation. The Messenger of Allaah (pbuh) said to me, ‘Have you got your menses?’ I said, ‘Yes.’ Then he called me and made me lie with him under the same sheet.”

She said: “And she told me that the Prophet (pbuh) used to kiss her when he was fasting, and the Prophet (pbuh) and I used to do ghusl to cleanse ourselves from janaabah from one vessel.” (Narrated by Al-Bukhari, 316; Muslim, 296)

2. Having fun: It was narrated that 'Urwah ibn al-Zubayr said: "Aisha said: 'By Allaah, I saw the Messenger of Allaah (pbuh) standing at the door of my apartment when the Abyssinians were playing with their spears in the Mosque of the Messenger of Allaah (pbuh). He covered me with his cloak so that I could watch their games, then he stood there for my sake until I was the one who had had enough. So you should appreciate the fact that young girls like to have fun.'" (Narrated by Al-Bukhari, 443; Muslim, 892)

3. Awake or asleep: It was narrated from Aisha the Mother of the Believers (may Allaah be pleased with her) that the Messenger of Allaah (pbuh) used to pray sitting down: "He would recite Qur'an when he was sitting down, then when there were thirty or forty ayahs left, he would stand up and recite them standing up. Then he did rukoo', then sujood; then he would do likewise in the second rak'ah. When he had finished his prayer, he would look, and if I were awake, he would talk with me, and if I were asleep he would lie down." (Narrated by Al-Bukhari, 1068)

4. Hudaybiyyah: A smart husband consults with his wife in the decision making process as Prophet Mohammad (pbuh) did with Umm Salamah may Allaah be please with her in the Hudaybiyyah treaty.

5. Secrets: Do not divulge her secrets to anyone. Otherwise, you would be like the parable that was given of two shaytans mating in the street.

6. Protection: Protect her from all harm or anything that would lead her astray. If you are willing to close the window to protect your wife from the heat of the summer or the cold of the winter, how could you not want to protect your wife from the Hellfire; so you can be together in Jannah in-sha-Allaah.

7. Permission: Give her permission to go visit her family and the righteous company, given that you make sure she is dressed according to Shariah.

8. Nature: Understanding the nature of your wife first and foremost as a woman in the manner Allaah (swt) created her.

Prophet Mohammad (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) said: “Indeed the woman was created from a rib and would not always be straight. So, if you enjoy her, enjoy her accordingly. Because if you want to straighten it (the rib), it would be broken, meaning divorce”. (Muslim)

9. Resentment: No ill feelings or resentment should result in placing a wedge in the relationship.

“And if you dislike them, you may dislike something, and Allaah makes a lot of good in it.” (Surat al-Nisā’, 4:19)

Prophet Mohammad (swt) said: “A true believer (Husband) should not dislike a true believer (Wife), if he dislikes one manner, he likes others.” (Muslim)

10. Jealousy: Be jealous in a moderate way according to the Hadith:

Prophet Mohammad (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) said: "Allaah likes and dislikes jealousies. The one that He likes in time of doubt; and the one He dislikes is otherwise." (Abū Dāwūd and An-Nisa'ai)

Prophet Mohammad (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) said: "Indeed Allaah gets jealous (in a way befitting His Majesty) and a true believer also gets jealous."

Also, "Three types of people will not enter Heaven, amongst them al-dayooth meaning the man that does not get jealous for his honour."

11. Romance: Be romantic with your wife, especially at the times of intimacy, give her a nickname like the Prophet Mohammad (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) used to call 'Ā'ishah ('Ā'ish) and be playful with her including a footrace.

Our mother 'Ā'ishah may Allaah be pleased with her said: "I use to drink while I was menstruating, then I would give the glass to Prophet Mohammad (pbuh), and he would place his mouth where my mouth was; same with the food." (Muslim)



e. Not harming one's wife

This is one of the basic principles of Islam: It was narrated from 'Ubaadah ibn al-Saamit that the Messenger of Allaah (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) ruled, "There should be neither harming nor reciprocating of harm." (Narrated by Ibn Maajah, 2340)

The Farewell sermon: It was narrated from Jaabir R.A. that the Messenger of Allaah (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) said in his Farewell Sermon: "Fear Allaah concerning women! Verily you have taken them on the security of Allaah, and intercourse with them has been made lawful unto you by words of Allaah. You too have rights over them, and that they should not allow anyone to sit on your bed [i.e., not let them into the house] whom you do not like. But if they do that, you can discipline them but not severely. Their rights upon you are that you should provide them with food and clothing in a fitting manner." (Narrated by Muslim, 1218)

Glass vessels: Can you imagine your beautiful daughter ... you'll never forget the first time you saw her face, her first word, first smile, and first step. How would you feel if she were abused by her husband?

Remember that 'strength' according to the Prophet Mohammad (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) is controlling yourself at the time of anger.

He also said, “Be gentle in dealing with the glass vessels [women].” (Muslim)

Patience: It was narrated from the righteous predecessors that from the best moral conducts of the husband are that he should not harm his wife. However, you should be patient upon her harm unto you.

Take Prophet Mohammad (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) as an example in dealing with his wives. He used to tell ‘Ā’ishah, may Allaah be pleased, with her, “I know when you are happy with me and I know when you are not. When you are happy with me you say, ‘Nay by the Lord of Mohammad’ and when you are not happy with me you say, ‘Nay by the Lord of Ibrahim.’”

Even though Imam Abu Hanifah was the most knowledgeable at the time, his own wife did not accept his opinion, but she accepted the opinion of his student Abu Yusuf.

Love and Mercy: “And of His signs is that He created for you from yourselves mates that you may find tranquillity in them; and He placed between you affection and mercy.” (Sūrat al-Rūm, 30:21)

Measuring stick: Prophet Mohammad (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) set the measuring stick for men as who is the best amongst them and said, “You have completed your faith if you have perfected your

moral conduct. And the best of you; the best to his wife.” (Tirmidhi, Ibn Hiban)

Imām Ahmad’s advice for his son upon his marriage:

*O My son: [Indeed] you will never attain happiness in your home except through ten qualities that you should show towards your wife. So, learn these from me and make sure you implement them:*

*As for the first and the second [of these], then [remember] women love to be pampered and told they are loved, so do not be miserly in [either of] these towards your wife. And if you were to fall short [in them] you would create a barrier in affection, causing your love to become deficient.*

*As for the third, [know] women despise the harsh, resolute man and abuse the gentle, yielding one. So show each attribute in its [rightful] place for that will be most conducive towards [creating] compassion and bringing about tranquillity.*

*As for the fourth, [know] women want from their husbands what their husbands want from them: pleasant conversation, beautified appearance, cleanliness in garments and sweetness of smells – so make sure you are just at all times.*

*As for the fifth, [know] the home is the female’s dominion; in it she feels as if seated on her throne, being mistress over it. Beware of destroying this kingdom that*

*she lives in, and beware of attempting to move her off her throne; for if you were to wrest her dominion from her, then [realise] that the sovereign has not a severer enemy than the one who seeks to challenge his kingdom, even if outward appearances indicate otherwise.*

*As for the sixth, [remember that] the woman hopes to win her husband without losing her family: beware of setting yourself up against her family so as to make her choose between you or them. For even if she were to choose you over them, she would be aggrieved with such sadness and sorrow your daily life would be contaminated.*

*As for the seventh, [know] the woman is created from a curved rib. This is the secret of the beauty [you find] in her and the secret of the attraction [you feel] towards her, it is not a defect, [in fact it is] like the eyebrow which is beautified by its arch. So, when she makes mistakes, do not be upset with her without showing forbearance towards her. [And know that if you were to] attempt to straighten her 'curvature' you would break her, and this breaking would be divorce. Neither should you indulge her faults so that she increases in them manifold to the extent that she would never again become compassionate towards you, nor will she listen to you – but try [instead] to always be with her as something between the two, neither being harsh nor servile.*

*As for the eighth, [realise] women have a propensity of ingratitude towards their husbands and ungratefulness in the face of goodness. To the point that even if you were to be good throughout all your days and fell short [only] once she would say, 'I have never seen any goodness from you, ever!' However, do not let your dislike of this one characteristic sway you into hating or despising her for if this is disliked [to you] you'll [also] find what you like.*

*As for the ninth then know that the woman goes through many states of physical and mental weakness to the extent that Allaah – glorified and elevated is He – lifted from her, during these, a group of obligations that He has enjoined. The prayer has completely been lifted from her [during this time] and the fast has been postponed [also] ... [both] till her health and 'well-being' are restored. So [I advise you] to be towards her [in her state of weakness] as Allaah has been, and as He reduced His obligations from her so should you reduce your requests and commands.*

*As for the tenth [then know that] the woman is like a captive in your care, so have mercy on her in her captivity and overlook her weaknesses [and if you observe all of this you will find that] ... she will be unto you the most enjoyable and best of companions."*

### **The Wife's Duties toward Her Husband**

In Islam, the wife and the husband are equal when it comes to obligatory acts of worship. However, the rank of preference of men upon women that is mentioned in the Qur'an is the rank of responsibilities and guardianship.

“And due to the wives is similar to what is expected of them, according to what is reasonable. But the men have a degree over them (in responsibility and authority).” (Sūrat al-Baqarah, 2:228)

Al-Jassaas said: “Allaah (SWT) tells us in this aayah that each of the spouses has rights over the other and that the husband has one particular right over his wife which she does not have over him.”

Ibn al-'Arabi said: “This text states that he has some preference over her with regard to rights and duties of marriage.”

#### a. Obedience

Allaah (SWT) has made the man a qawwām (protector and maintainer) of the woman, by taking care of her and leading by example, just as guardians take care of their charges.

“Men are in charge of women by (right of) what Allaah has given one over the other and what they spend (for maintenance) from their wealth.” (Sūrat al-Nisā', 4:34)

Prophet Mohammad (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) gave women the glad tidings of Jannah through the following acts: Prophet Mohammad (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) said: "If a woman prayed her five (obligatory prayers), fasted her month (Ramadan), protected her chastity, and was obedient to her husband; it will be said unto her: enter Jannah through any of its gates you wish".

Hussayen Ibn Muhsan said: "My aunt told me that she went to Prophet Mohammad seeking help; he said: 'Do you have a husband?' I said yes. He said: 'How are you to him?' She said: I do my best in his obedience and service. He said: 'See how you are to him, indeed; he is your Heaven and Hellfire.'" (Ahmad and Al-Nisa'ai)

Prophet Mohammad said: "Any woman that died while her husband was pleased with her will enter Jannah." (Ibn Majah and al-Tirmidhi)

Prophet Mohammad: "Have I not told you about your women in Jannah?" We said: No O messenger of Allaah. He said: "The loving fertile one; if she gets angry, was mistreated, or her husband was angry." She said: "Here is my hand in yours, I will not sleep until you are pleased with me." (al-ṣaḥīḥah, 287)

#### b. Making herself available to her husband

One of the duties the wife has towards her husband is that he should be able to enjoy her (physically) just as she has the right to enjoy him (physically).

If he marries a woman and she is able to have intercourse, she is obliged to not refuse intimacy (under normal circumstances without illness etc.), if he asks her.

That is after he gives her the immediate mahr, and gives her some time – two or three days, if she asks for that – to sort herself out, because that is something that she needs, and because that is not too long and is customary.

The husband is not permitted or allowed to force his wife into intercourse under any circumstances. However, if the wife refuses to respond to her husband's request for intercourse, she has done something ḥarām (unlawful) and has committed a major sin, unless she has a valid shar'ī excuse such as menses, obligatory fasting, sickness, etc. Husbands should remember the teaching of Islam to be gentle with your wife and not be harsh with her during the day and expect to be intimate with her during the night.

It was narrated that Abu Hurairah R.A. said: "The Messenger of Allaah (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) said: 'When a man calls his wife to his bed and she refuses, and he went to sleep angry with her, the angels will curse her until morning.'" (Narrated by Al-Bukhārī, 3065; Muslim, 1436)

c. Not admitting anyone whom the husband dislikes



If the husband notices any changes in the harmony and tranquility of the marital relationship after a visit from anyone, he has the right of refusal to that certain individual. It was narrated from Abu Hurairah R.A. that the Messenger of Allaah (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) said: "It is not permitted for a woman to fast when her husband is present without his permission, or to admit anyone into his house without his permission. And whatever she spends (in charity) of his wealth without his consent." (Narrated by Al-Bukhārī, 4899; Muslim, 1026)

It was narrated that Jaabir said: "Prophet Mohammad (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) said:

'Fear Allaah concerning women! Verily you have taken them on the security of Allaah, and intercourse with them has been made lawful unto you by the words of Allaah. You too have rights over them, and that they should not allow anyone to sit on your bed [i.e., not let them into the house] whom you do not like. But if they do that, you can discipline them but not severely. Their rights upon you are that you should provide them with food and clothing in a fitting manner.' (Narrated by Muslim, 1218)

#### d. Permission when leaving the house

Due to the obligation upon the man for the safety and security of his wife, she is requested to notify her husband prior to leaving the house, unless previously

agreed upon. I suggest agreeing on certain guidelines, so you don't have to ask every time, but to notify the husband as a matter of safety and precautionary measures.

e. Serving her husband

Even though there are differences of opinion regarding this matter, the stronger opinion suggests that it is not an obligation upon her to serve her husband, unless agreed upon in their culture. If the man is financially able, he should hire a servant to perform house chores, as it is not the obligation of the wife to do so.

Sheikh al-Islam Ibn Taymiyah R.A. said: "She is obliged to serve her husband according to what is reasonable among people of similar standing."

That varies according to circumstances: The way in which a Bedouin woman serves (her husband) will not be like the way of a town-dweller, and the way of a strong woman will not be like the way of a weak woman. (al-Fatāwa al-Kubrā, 4/561)

Ali Ibn Abi Talib R.A. narrates that Fatimah, may Allaah be pleased with her, the daughter of Prophet Mohammad (pbuh), went to complain to him about the suffering she is going through from the house chores. She heard that he received slaves and she asked him to get one to serve her. He said: "Should I not tell you something better than what you asked? If you go to bed; say Subhana Allaah 33, Alhamdulillah 33, and

Allaahu Akbar 34, that is better than a servant.” (Agreed upon)

f. Good Manners

“And due to the wives is similar to what is expected of them, according to what is reasonable. But the men have a degree over them (in responsibility and authority).” (Sūrat al-Baqarah, 2:228)

Hadith of the ‘guest’ Mu‘ādh Ibn Jabal R.A. elevated: “If a woman harms her husband in this life; the Maidens will say, do not harm him, may Allaah harm you; he is only a guest with you, and soon he will leave you to our company.” (al-ṣaḥīḥah, 173)

Hadith regarding the dwellers of hellfire: Prophet Mohammad (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) said: “I have seen the Hellfire, never seeing anything like it before; and I saw the majority of its dwellers are women.” They said: “Why O Messenger of Allaah?” He said: “By their disbelief.” It was then said: “They disbelief in Allaah?” He said: “They are ungrateful in their lives and benevolence. If you were good to her all of your life and she has seen something (That displeases her), she said: ‘I never saw any good from you.’” (Agreed upon)

Anas Ibn Malik R.A. said: “The son of Abu Talhah from Um Sulaym died and she told her family, ‘Do not tell

Abu Talahah about his son till I tell him.’ When he came, she prepared dinner, so he ate and drank. She then beautified herself to him better than ever and spent the evening with her. Then she said, ‘O Abu Talhah; what do you say if people lend us something, and then ask for it back, should we hold back from them?’ He said, ‘No.’ She said, ‘Seek the reward from Allaah in your son.’ He then got upset because she waited until morning to tell him. He rushed to Prophet Mohammad and told him what happened. Prophet Mohammad said to him, ‘May Allaah bless you both in your evening.’” (Agreed upon)

I want to share the story of a female companion who was called “the representative of women.”

Al Hafith Ibn Abdul Bar mentioned that Asma bint al Yazeed approached the Messenger of Allaah (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) and said: “I am a messenger for a group of females. All of them say a similar statement to mine, and they all are in agreement with my opinion. Indeed Allaah has sent you to men and women, and we have believed in you and we follow you. We (females) are responsible for tending to the homes and we are the place where men fulfill their desires, in addition to carrying their children (during pregnancy). But the men are preferred over us due to the merits gained for attending the Friday congregational prayer, attending burial procedures and also fighting in the way of Allaah. If they leave their homes, we protect their wealth and we also raise their children. (With this being the case) do we take part in

their tremendous reward, oh Messenger of Allaah (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him)?”

Upon hearing this, the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) turned toward his male companions and said: “Have you ever heard a female inquiring about her religion in a better manner than this female?”

The companions replied: “Indeed we have not, oh Messenger of Allaah (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him)”

The Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) then replied to her: “Return oh Asma, and inform the group of females that being a good wife to your husband, exerting yourself to please him, and have him pleased with you is equivalent (in reward) to all of what you have mentioned concerning the men!”

Asma walked away saying, “La illaaha illa Allaah, Allaahu Akbar” due to the extreme joy she felt after hearing the Prophet’s (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) reply. (Ibn Abi Aldunia)

Finally a letter from a loving mother to her daughter:

Here is a letter given from a caring mother to her daughter on the eve of her wedding, which should be written with a gold leaf. ‘Amr Ibn Hijr, the king of Kindah, got engaged to Umm Iyas Bint ‘Awf al-Shaybani. When it was the time for her wedding, her mother

Umamah Bint Al-Harith spent precious moments with her to advise her, and give her the fundamental principles of love and mercy.

*“O my daughter, indeed if the advice was left for good manners and conducts I would have left that to you, but it is a reminder for the heedless and an aid for those of intellect. If a woman can do without the husband then her parent would have sufficed. However, women were created for men, and men were created for them.*

*O my daughter, you have separated from the environment that you came out of and left the nest you grew within for a strange place and unfamiliar partner. So, be a companion to him in his kingdom – a slave to him, and he will be a slave to you. Safeguard ten characteristics for him; it would be a treasure for you.*

*First and second: humble yourself to him with contentment and be obedient.*

*Third and fourth: be aware of what he sees and smells. His eyes should not see anything unpleasant and he should smell nothing but sweet fragrances.*

*Fifth and sixth: be aware of the times that he sleeps and eats. Indeed hunger is painful and sleeplessness is a cause of anger.*

*Seventh and eighth: be careful with his wealth and children. Indeed the owner of wealth is appreciation and in children is frugality.*

*Ninth and tenth: do not disobey his command and do not divulge his secrets. Indeed if you disobey his command, you will discomfort his heart with pain, and if you divulge his secrets, you will not be safe from his."*

Please note that you both are each other's measuring stick, especially when it comes to your manners. So, if you want to be together in Paradise with Prophet Mohammad (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him), then be good to each other, as if your life depended on it, because it does.

## **Chapter Eight: Grade Your Marriage<sup>13</sup>**

It is useful occasionally to take stock of the marital relationship you are in so you, along with your partner, can improve on the areas that can use some of your attention. This section is geared to support you in that respect, and is adapted and quoted from the always useful For Your Marriage website, which features a lot of great stuff on this and related matters. I have edited and adapted some of the material to conform to an Islamic context.

Marriage is not a test that you either pass or fail. It is an ongoing process of learning about each other and accommodating differences so that both of you can feel satisfied and grow in love for one other.

Marriage is also not a competition in which one person wins at the expense of the other. If both spouses are not happy with a decision, then the marriage suffers, since one person's happiness cannot be at the expense of another.

In this spirit, it is useful to assess where you are in your marriage:

- Identify the issues that you agree on to ensure they are working smoothly for you.



- Identify the issues that you disagree on and for which you need to work out a compromise.
- Identify the issues that you have not gotten around to talking about, but should.

All this can add up to a blueprint for a deeper understanding of your marriage and for helping, you reach your full marriage potential. The following categories can help get you started.

**On a scale of 1 – 10, rate your satisfaction with your marriage in the following areas (1 being the poorest, etc.):**

1. Shared Values \_\_\_\_\_
2. Commitment to each other \_\_\_\_\_
3. Communication Skills \_\_\_\_\_
4. Conflict Resolution Skills \_\_\_\_\_
5. Intimacy/Sexuality \_\_\_\_\_
6. Spirituality/Faith \_\_\_\_\_
7. Money Management \_\_\_\_\_
8. Appreciation/Affection \_\_\_\_\_
9. Lifestyle \_\_\_\_\_
10. Recreation \_\_\_\_\_

11. Decision Making \_\_\_\_\_

12. Parenthood \_\_\_\_\_

13. Household Chores / Gender Differences \_\_\_\_\_

14. Careers \_\_\_\_\_

15. Balancing Time \_\_\_\_\_

**TOTAL:** \_\_\_\_\_

This is not a test but rather a map for you to use for further discussion with your spouse.

**8-10:** You are quite happy with this aspect of your marriage. This could be because you are generally an optimistic and easygoing person or that you have been very positive about working on this aspect of your marriage.

**4-7:** You are sliding along in this aspect of your marriage, perhaps not paying much attention to it or avoiding areas of conflict. It is also possible that you have high expectations and are not an easy grader.

**1-3:** You are pretty dissatisfied with this aspect of your marriage.

Another way of assessing whether you need to pay more attention to certain areas of your marriage is by comparing answers with your spouse. If your ratings on

any given topic differ by more than three points, you will want to discuss why.

**Finally, if both you and your spouse have total scores of:**

**100+** Give yourself an A – but do not get proud or complacent.

**75-99** Give yourself a B – you are in good shape and should be able to pinpoint areas that you want to discuss further.

**50-74** Give yourself a C – You may have much to discuss or one of you may be more dissatisfied than the other. Check it out.

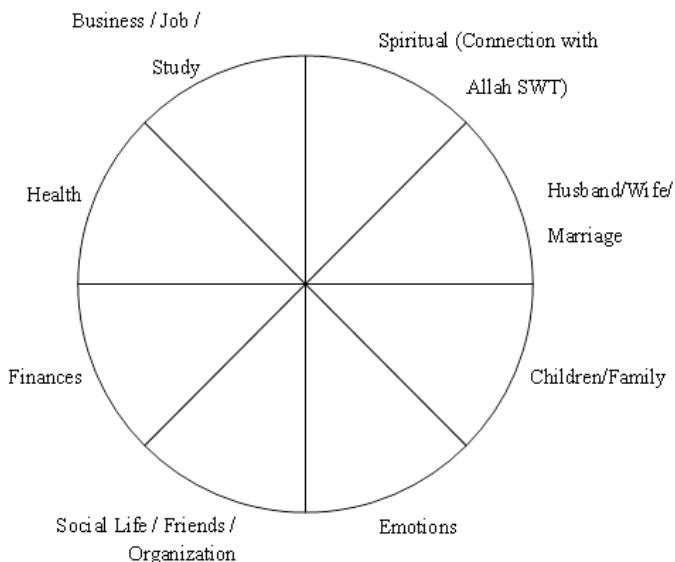
**15-49** Looks like trouble.

Score chart:

<input type="radio"/>	<b>Shared Values</b>
<input type="radio"/>	<b>Commitment to each other</b>
<input type="radio"/>	<b>Communication skills</b>
<input type="radio"/>	<b>Conflict resolution skills</b>
<input type="radio"/>	<b>Intimacy/Sexuality</b>
<input type="radio"/>	<b>Spirituality/Faith</b>
<input type="radio"/>	<b>Money management</b>
<input type="radio"/>	<b>Appreciation/Affection</b>
<input type="radio"/>	<b>Lifestyle</b>
<input type="radio"/>	<b>Recreation</b>
<input type="radio"/>	<b>Decision Making</b>
<input type="radio"/>	<b>Parenthood</b>
<input type="radio"/>	<b>Household chores / gender differences</b>
<input type="radio"/>	<b>Careers</b>
<input type="radio"/>	<b>Balancing time</b>
<input type="radio"/>	<b>TOTAL</b>

### The wheel of life:

Here is also an interesting and quick way to get an overall picture of your life:



Each slice in the wheel represents a part of your life.

Number each slice on a scale from 0 to 10 (0 meaning total disaster and 10 meaning pure excellence).

This gives you a quick snapshot of how you picture your life thus far. From here, you can then work on improving the slices that are most important to you.

## **Long-term Goals**

What am I doing now?

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

What do I want to do ONE month from now?

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

What do I want to do SIX months from now?

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

What do I want to do ONE year from now?

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

What do I want to do FIVE years from now?

1.

2.

3.

What is my Long-term goal?

1.

2.

3.

What is my DREAM Goal?

1.

2.

3.

## **Chapter Nine: Strategies to Turn Conflicts into Resolutions<sup>14</sup>**

I want to share some secrets with you before we start this chapter.

Have you heard of the filters theory? Well, let us test yours.

What do you think of a man who's 55 years of age and has no job? If you said he's lazy or uneducated then you have negative filters. If you said that he does not need a job because he is a rich businessman, then you have positive filters. The way we perceive things affects the way we deal with them. You now know whether to keep or change your filters.

Also, what do you see when you're shown a white page with a black dot in the middle? Just the black dot or all white dots that surround it?

In other words, are you someone who can only see what's missing in others' personalities or do you see a person in light of the bigger picture?

In order to work through some of these issues, I've edited and remodeled a plan from Dr. Susan Heitler, Ph.D., who has contributed the following blueprint in *Psychology Today*. I've adapted and edited some of her points to fit a more Islamic framework.



When couples first contact me for marriage help, they typically feel distressed and even hopeless about their relationship. However, if they have the ability look back and remember earlier times when things were better, then it's usually a sign that a marriage can be saved. In fact, such a marriage has the potential to become the kind of partnership that the couple had hoped for when they said, "I do."

What transitions couples from desperation about their difficulties to delight in sharing their lives together? Here is the 8-step pathway along which I guide my clients and which you are welcome to pursue as well.

**1. Make a list of all the issues** about which you have disagreements, including the issues that you refrain from talking about out of fear that simply talking might lead to arguing.

Your self-help treatment will be complete when you have found mutually agreeable solutions to all of these issues and have also learned the skills to resolve new issues as they arise with similar win-win solutions.

If the list seems interminable because you fight about everything—from the time of day to where to live then the odds are that the problem is less about you having differences and more about improving the manner in which you talk with one other.

**2. Fix your focus solidly on yourself.** Attempts to get your partner to change will invite defensiveness. No one likes being told they are doing things wrong, let alone that they are a bad person. It's better for both of you to use your energy and intelligence to figure out what YOU could do differently.

Here is a question that can get you started: What would enable you to stay loving and good-humoured even if the most frustrating aspects of your spouse never get fixed? The answer is that if both of you are seeking to do your own upgrades, then the marriage will blossom. This is how to become "self-centered" in the best sense.

**3. Cut the nonsense.** The point is that the negative muck that you give each other is totally unhelpful. It only taints a positive relationship. This means cutting out the criticism, complaints, blame, accusations, anger, sarcasm, mean digs and snide remarks.... get it?

No more anger escalations either. Stay in the calm zone. Exit early if either of you is beginning to get heated. Learn to calm yourself and then re-engage cooperatively.

Research psychologist John Gottman has found that marriages generally survive if the ratio of good to bad interactions is 5 to 1. Do you want to barely survive or do you want to thrive? If thriving is your goal, then aim for a 100,000,000:1 ratio! That means no mudslinging at all!

**4. Learn how to express concerns constructively.** A simple way to do this in a sensitive conversation is to stick with the following four-sentence-starter options. In my clinical work, I call these "the pink sheet." I put a pink sheet of paper with these options printed on it to couples to use in discussions on topics that they know can be prickly. They're as follows:

*I feel...* (a one-word feeling such as anxious, sad, etc.)

*My concern is...*

*I would like to...* [note, NEVER use "I would like you to ...."]

*How would you feel about that? Or, what are your thoughts on that?*

You can also use the sandwich theory, where you present your concern like a sandwich. Start with a soft bun, then the beef, and finish with another soft bun. For example: "Honey I love you very much and I know you've been working very hard for us, but I have a concern with our financial situation, though I know that you can definitely handle it."

**5. Learn how to make decisions cooperatively.**

I call collaborative decision-making the "win-win waltz."

The goal of the win-win solution is a plan of action that pleases you both. No more aiming to "get your way." Instead, when you have differences, express your

underlying concerns, listen to your partner's concerns and create a solution that is effective for all the concerns that you both have.

Practice this skill on all the issues you listed in step 1. You may be amazed at how you can really find mutually agreeable solutions even for the issues that seemed insurmountable.

## **6. Eliminate the three A's that ruin marriage.**

**Affairs, Addictions, and excessive Anger** are deal-breakers. They are out-of-bounds in any healthy marriage.

If you are indulging in one of these self-defeating and relationship-destroying habits, get help and get it quickly.

If your spouse has these problems and cannot change, then saving the marriage might even be a mistaken goal. It is better to end such a marriage than to tolerate these terrible habits.

However, the ideal solution for both of you is to commit to building a new kind of marriage, a marriage where there are zero affairs, addictions or excessive anger issues. Instead, there should be a marriage that's filled with love and trust. You can rebuild your old relationship into a new one, as long as both partners are willing.

## **7. Radically increase the positive energy you give your partner.**

Smile more, touch more, and hug more. More “eye kisses,” more sex, more shared time and projects, more appreciation, and more dwelling on what you like about your partner. All this will help.

Respond more often with agreeing to the things your partner says, whereas you may have usually answered with “But...” in the past. To listen is to love, especially when you are listening to process information and not to show what’s wrong with what your partner says or to show that you know more.

Help out more. Give more praise and more gratitude. Do more fun activities together. Laugh and joke more. Do new things and go to new places together.

The best things in life really are free. And the more positives you give, the more you will get in return.

I wrote above about Gottman's 5:1 ratio. Increasing the positives is every bit as important as decreasing negatives to hit that 100,000,000:1 ratio!

## **8. Look back at your parents' marriage's strengths and weaknesses. Decide what you want to do differently.**

When people marry, they bring along a recording in their head of how their parents treated each other and also how their parents treated them. This is where folks

learn patterns of interacting for intimate relationships.  
Decide consciously what to imitate from your parents'  
relationship and what you want to do differently.

## **Chapter Ten: Being Part of the Solution<sup>15</sup>**

When couples come to my office to address a concern, I always ask the following things:

1. To prioritize their concerns/issues and work on them, one issue at a time;
2. To suggest a solution;
3. A game plan to implement their suggestion;
4. And the best of all, how you can help in implementing the solution.

Now everyone is part of the solution and not the problem. Also, please make sure you address the behaviour and not the person. For example: “Honey, I love you, but your behaviour is unacceptable.”

The following is a guide that I’ve adapted and quoted from a discussion of these issues from WebMD. I’ve edited some of the material to fit our context a bit better, but the bulk of the insights hold for pretty much all couple scenarios.

It is the rare couple that doesn't run into a few bumps in the road. But you recognize ahead of time what these relationship problems might be, then you will have a much better chance of getting past them.

Marriage and family therapist Mitch Temple, author of *The Marriage Turnaround*, notes that even though

every relationship has its ups and downs, it's the successful couples who've learned how to manage the downs in order to keep their love lives going. They hang in there to tackle the problems together and to learn how to work through the complex issues of everyday life. Many do this by reading self-help books and articles, attending seminars, going to counselling, observing other successful couples or simply by using trial and error.

### **Relationship Problem: Communication**

All relationship problems stem from poor communication, according to Elaine Fantle Shimberg, author of *Blending Families*. "You can't communicate while you're checking your BlackBerry, watching TV or flipping through the sports section," she says.

#### **Problem-solving strategies:**

- Make an actual appointment with each other, Shimberg says. If you live together, put the cell phones on vibrate, put the kids to bed and let voicemail pick up your calls.
- If you can't "communicate" without raising your voices, go to a public spot like the library, park, or restaurant where you would be embarrassed if anyone saw you screaming.



- Set up some rules. Try not to interrupt until your partner is done speaking or ban phrases such as "You always ..." or "You never ...."
- Use body language to show that you are listening. Don't doodle, look at your watch or pick at your nails. Nod so the other person knows you are getting the message and rephrase if you need to. For instance, say, "What I hear you saying is that you feel as though you have more chores at home, even though we are both working." If you're right, the other can confirm. If what the other person really meant was, "Hey, you're a slob and you create more work for me by having to pick up after you," he or she can say so but in a nicer way.

### **Relationship Problem: Sex**

Even partners who love each other can be a mismatch, sexually. Mary Jo Fay, the author of *Please Dear, Not Tonight*, says a lack of sexual self-awareness and education worsens these problems. But having sex is one of the last things you should give up, Fay says. "Sex," she says, "brings us closer together, releases hormones that help our bodies both physically and mentally and keeps the chemistry of a healthy couple healthy."

### **Problem-solving strategies:**

- Plan, plan and plan. Fay suggests making an appointment but not necessarily at night when everyone is tired. Maybe during the baby's Saturday afternoon nap or a "before-work quickie." Ask friends or family to take the kids every other Friday night for a sleepover. "When sex is on the calendar, it increases your anticipation," Fay says. Changing things up a bit can make sex more fun, too, she says. Why not make out in the kitchen? Or by the fire? Or standing up in the hallway?
- Learn what truly turns you and your partner on by each of you coming up with a personal "Sexy List," suggests California psychotherapist Allison Cohen. Swap the lists and use them to create more scenarios that turn both of you on.
- If your sexual relationship problems can't be resolved on your own, Fay recommends consulting a qualified sex therapist to help you both address and resolve your issues.

### **Keeping sex alive after having kids**

Get tips for rekindling your romantic relationship.

Winter in Canada can get brutal, with snow piled up and winds whipping at your doorstep but don't let anything freeze up your relationship! Ahmed and Sara, parents of

three young kids, understand the importance of keeping the fire blazing.

"We have a special spot in the basement where we go," Sara laughs. "The kids can't find us there." Sara and Ahmed are just one of many couples who face the challenge of trying to keep a healthy sex life after the kids arrive.

### **When pregnancy halts libido**

Sex can diminish in frequency even before the kids arrive. Pregnant women can find that lovemaking becomes more difficult because of their changing body. Then, after a baby is born, intercourse can be uncomfortable. Yousef, 30, a Toronto computer programmer recalls, "It took at least four months for my wife to heal. We tried it once or twice but it hurt too much."

A woman's sex drive can also decrease if she is breastfeeding. Dr. Pierre Assalian, the chief psychiatrist at Montreal General's department of psychiatry, warns that breastfeeding women produce, prolactin, a hormone that can kill libido.

### **The stresses of parenthood**

He also warns that an exhausted woman will not be a responsive one. A new mother who washes dishes and laundry and puts the kids to bed every night probably

won't often be in the mood. It's important not to put the entire child raising responsibility on one person. Restore balance to the relationship by pitching in and showing that you care.

Differences of opinion over child rearing can also be a strain on couples. Claire Maisonneuve, a Vancouver-based clinical counsellor says, "You don't feel like being sexual when you have just been told, in front of your kids, 'No, you don't have to do what Mom says.' So, please show respect to each other.

### **The evolution of a relationship**

An important element to re-energizing your love life is to be realistic. Lovemaking sessions may not be as frequent or spontaneous as they once were. In the rush of planning family activities, couples may have to schedule a time to be intimate. Men, in particular, can feel they have to express affection physically but Maisonneuve says they should love with their hearts instead of just other parts of their bodies.

### **Going on a rendezvous**

Escaping the kids for a weekend may seem like the answer to reclaiming your passion. "Couples who have a good intimate relationship, kids or no kids, have a passion continually explored in a close relationship," Maisonneuve says. "You don't need gadgets and

expensive hotels, although there is no doubt sometimes it is better to get away."

When you are feeling romantic and the kids are younger, it is easy to sneak into the other room during naptime. As they get older, a lock on your bedroom door allows more privacy.

There is no concrete formula to achieving a good sex life after having kids. But if you work at building intimacy and passion, a lifetime of great sex can await you.

### **Five ways to maintain your sex life after having kids**

Has your sex life diminished after having children? Learn how you can take out some alone time and maintain a healthy level of intimacy despite your duties as parents.

By the time dinner is eaten, the table is cleared and the kids are in bed, the precious minutes left over for you and your partner probably involve more snoozing than pillow talk.

Before you resign yourself to the fact that there is no time for intimacy, know that there are some effective means of making time for sex amid your parental duties

Marriage counsellor Susan Blackburn has some tips on how to keep that romantic spark alive even when the needs of your family get in the way. After all, it is not just important for a healthy relationship but also for the whole family.

"Couples who nurture the marriage first have far more to give, not only to one another but also to their kids," says Blackburn. "A strong emotional connection with one's partner provides a stable and secure foundation for children and parents alike."

Here are her tips for keeping intimacy alive in your marriage.

### 1. Plan date nights in advance

The most successful couples never stop dating, even well into their marriage. "Dating provides the time to connect emotionally, have fun together and revive romance and affection," Blackburn explains.

Getting out of the house for an evening out can really breathe life back into your marriage, so make dating a habit. In order to ensure your time together does not eventually fall to the bottom of your list of priorities, plan dates ahead of time and actually put them on the calendar. "Without scheduling dates in advance, couples rarely have time left over after family obligations like chauffeuring, cooking and cleaning have been taken care of."

### 2. Make childcare arrangements for your kids

Date night should always take place in a kid-free zone. After all, this is your time to step away from your daily responsibilities. But planning care arrangements for the kids might be easier said than done.

"If you find yourself without the trusted help you need to get out for a date, consider joining playgroups in your neighbourhood, trading babysitting with other couples so that you rotate nights out and getting up the nerve to ask family members and friends to give you a break," Blackburn suggests. "More often than not, your friends and loved ones would be happy to help if they knew you needed it."

### 3. Don't let the kids sleep in your bed

It might be an easy routine to get into -- and an even more difficult one to break -- but co-sleeping can widen the gap between you and your partner, both in bed and beyond.

"Allowing children to sleep in the marital bed is one of the fastest ways to put out the romantic flame between married partners," warns Blackburn. "Couples can make their bed a no-kid zone while still being inviting, warm and honest parents. Remember that children feel more secure when their parents are affectionate and have a close connection," she adds.

### 4. Surprise your partner every now and then

Just like maintaining a regular date night, a few romantic surprises here and there can also help keep your marriage thriving both in and out of the bedroom. Why not slip a note into your partner's briefcase before work to serve as an unprompted reminder that you love him or her?

"Communicating with kindness and respect is key in creating and maintaining the romantic spark," explains Blackburn. Everyday communication should be positive and affirming but keeping it interesting is just as important.

#### 5. Make time for yourself

Maintaining a romantic bond starts with feeling good about yourself. Find time to do things that make you happy and those feelings of confidence and sexiness will follow.

"Bring out your inner siren by enjoying a warm bath, exercising, shaving or putting on makeup if that is desirable, wearing soft, feminine clothes in pink or red, getting pampered at the salon or by listening to a sensual environment," says Blackburn. When you feel relaxed, intimacy comes naturally.

Ensuring family demands don't zap the desire from your marriage requires placing a high priority on maintaining a strong connection with your partner. The most common factor involved in couples drifting apart is the belief that the children's needs are more important than the needs of the marriage, Blackburn explains that you can find a balance. Practicing intimacy and having regular alone time may take some getting used to but the results are well worth the effort.



## **Relationship Problem: Money**

Money problems can start even before the wedding vows are exchanged. They can stem, for example, from the expenses of courtship or from the high cost of a wedding. If you are a couple who has money woes, take a deep breath and have a serious conversation about finances.

### **Problem-solving strategies:**

- Be honest about your current financial situation. If things have gone south, continuing the same lifestyle is unrealistic.
- Don't approach the subject in the heat of battle. Instead, set aside a time that is convenient and non-threatening for both of you.
- Acknowledge that one partner may be a saver and one a spender. Understand there are benefits to both and agree to learn from each other's tendencies.
- Don't hide income or debt. Bring financial documents, including a recent credit report, pay stubs, bank statements, insurance policies, debts and investments to the table.
- Don't blame.
- Construct a joint budget that includes savings.

- Decide which person will be responsible for paying the monthly bills.
- Allow each person to have independence by setting aside money to be spent at his or her discretion.
- Decide upon short-term and long-term goals. It's OK to have individual goals but you should have family goals, too.
- Talk about caring for your parents as they age and how to appropriately plan for their financial needs if needed.

### **Relationship Problem: Struggles Over Home Chores**

Most partners work outside the home and often at more than one job. So it's important to fairly divide the labor at home, says Paulette Kouffman-Sherman, author of *Dating From the Inside Out*.

#### **Problem-solving strategies:**

- Be organized and clear about your respective jobs in the home, Kouffman-Sherman say. "Write all the jobs down and agree on who does what." Be fair so no resentment builds.
- Be open to other solutions, she says. If you both hate housework, maybe you can opt for a cleaning service. If one of you likes housework, the other partner can do the laundry and the

yard. You can be creative and take preferences into account -- as long as it feels fair to both of you.

### **Relationship Problem: Not Making Your Relationship a Priority**

If you want to keep your love life going, making your relationship a focal point should not end when you say, "I do." "Relationships lose their luster. So make yours a priority," says Karen Sherman, author of *Marriage Magic! Find It, Keep It, and Make It Last*.

#### **Problem-solving strategies:**

- Show appreciation, complement each other, contact each other through the day and show interest in each other.
- Plan date nights. Schedule time together on the calendar just as you would any other important event in your life.
- Respect one another. Say "thank you," and "I appreciate..." It lets your partner know that they matter.

### **Relationship Problem: Conflict**

Occasional conflict is a part of life, according to New York-based psychologist Susan Silverman. But if you and your partner feel like you are starring in your own nightmare version of the movie *Groundhog Day* -- i.e.

the same lousy situations keep repeating day after day - then it's time to break free of this toxic routine. When you make the effort, you can lessen the anger and take a calm look at underlying issues.

**Problem-solving strategies:**

You and your partner can learn to argue in a more civil, helpful manner, Silverman says. Make these strategies part of who you are in this relationship.

- Realize you are not a victim. It is your choice to decide how you react.
- Be honest with yourself. When you are in the midst of an argument, are your comments geared toward resolving the conflict or are you looking for payback? If your comments only blame and cause hurt, it is best to take a deep breath and change your strategy.
- Change it up. If you continue to respond in the way that has brought you pain and unhappiness in the past, you can't expect a different result this time. Just one little shift can make a big difference. If you usually jump right in to defend yourself before your partner is finished speaking, hold off for a few moments. You will be surprised at how such a small shift in tempo can change the whole tone of an argument.

- Give a little; get a lot. Apologize when you are wrong. Sure it is tough but try it and watch something wonderful happen.

"You can't control anyone else's behaviour," Silverman says. "The only one in charge is you."

### **Relationship Problem: Trust**

Trust is a key part of a relationship. Do you see certain things that cause you to not trust your partner? Or do you have unresolved issues that prevent you from trusting others?

### **Problem-solving strategies:**

You and your partner can develop trust in each other by following these tips, Fay says.

- Be consistent.
- Be on time.
- Do what you promise to do.
- Don't lie -- not even white lies should be told to your partner or to others.
- Be fair, even in an argument.
- Be sensitive to the other's feelings. You can still disagree but don't discount how your partner is feeling.

- Call when you say you will.
- Call to say you'll be home late.
- Carry your fair share of the workload.
- Don't overreact when things go wrong.
- Never say things you can't take back.
- Don't dig up old wounds.
- Respect your partner's boundaries.
- Don't be jealous.
- Be a good listener.

Even though there are always going to be problems in a relationship, Sherman says you both can do things to minimize marriage problems, if not avoid them altogether.

First, be realistic. Thinking your mate will meet all your needs -- and will be able to figure them out without your asking -- is a Hollywood fantasy. "Ask for what you need directly," she says.

Next, use humour -- learn to let things go and enjoy one another more.

Finally, be willing to work on your relationship and to truly look at what needs should be addressed. Don't think that things would be better with someone else.

Unless you address problems, the same lack of skills that get in your way now will still be there and still cause problems no matter what relationship you are in.

## **Chapter Eleven: Communication Skills**<sup>16</sup>

Now let's turn our attention to one of the most important aspects of a sustainable and smooth relationship: communication. There's no more vital issue since it's good communication that resolves problems within a marriage. The following chapter is quoted and adapted from a very useful discussion on intra-marriage communication from *Two of Us*, a very good resource for this and related topics.

A few common complaints of couples include, "he/she doesn't listen to me," "we don't communicate well," and "I don't feel heard." Most relationships will eventually have issues that need to be discussed. These issues may be big or small. Learning how to listen well and to communicate well involves learning some basic communication skills. Effective communication skills can help a couple navigate through difficult topics that may be hard to discuss.

As couples, we communicate for many different reasons. It may be just to talk or to manage the details of everyday life or a way to share ideas, ambitions, and dreams. Oftentimes, couples communicate with the intent to resolve conflict in the relationship. Communication on all levels is essential for a relationship to thrive. Unfortunately, most couples do not know how to manage conflict and this can lead to disharmony in a relationship. All couples will experience



conflict from time to time. How conflict is handled though is a key ingredient in the success of the marriage.

It takes two to communicate well. Learning to talk and really listen to each other is the first step towards good communication that will lead to effective conflict management. To help develop these skills, there are certain steps to follow. The skills discussed in this tip sheet will help you to become a better listener and speaker.

One of the first skills in effective communication is to realize that a positive approach and a “win-win” mentality will serve you well. Having positive regard for your partner and his/her thoughts and feelings are an important step.

Each person in a relationship brings with them a style of communication that has been shaped by their family background, life experiences and personality. Sometimes, this style of communications means that a person is more or less, emotional or expressive when talking. One person is also more or less likely to be the one to bring up an issue. Become familiar with your own and your partner’s communication style. An important key to good communication is to remember that you can only have one “speaker” and one “listener” at a time. If you learn to practice these skills when you are getting along well, they will be easier to use during difficult discussions.

Taking turns as both the speaker and the listener gives each member of the team a chance to speak, listen and to be understood. One basic idea is that both people have a message to communicate. Sometimes the message is communicated through active listening and conveys to the other person that you understand what they said. Other times, the message is communicated by speaking directly to the other person. Take a turn doing both and relinquish your turn as a speaker to allow the listener the same opportunity to be understood. Clarify that you both understand what the other is saying on a verbal and an emotional level.

### **Take a Chill**

Sometimes, despite the best of intentions, communication becomes too difficult for a couple. In these instances, someone gets angry, another stops playing by the rules, feelings get hurt or one person feels attacked. All of these negative behaviours undermine the goal of getting your message across or hearing your partner's concern. In these cases, taking a break from the discussion is best. To "take a chill" literally allows both people to let the heat and intensity of a discussion cool down enough to where it can be addressed under more relaxed circumstances. This communication break, or chill, can be for a few minutes or even longer if necessary. It should be long enough to give both speaker and listener time to regroup and to re-engage in the discussion of the issue. An important element in deciding to "take a chill" is recognizing that

when one person signals a need to pause the discussion, the other should respect their need for a break. In doing so, agree to a time when you will begin the discussion again. Taking a chill is a mutually agreed upon communication step with the understanding that the issue will be revisited later.

You can separately learn the skills for both speaking and listening but don't forget to review other skills so you will know what not to do as you practice both roles.

Communication with one another is a powerful tool—it can nurture feelings of love, admiration, and respect. It can also have a negative impact by creating hurt feelings and anger. Learning effective ways to communicate won't help you avoid conflict in your relationship but it will help prevent the conflict you do have from damaging your relationship.

The Ground Rules below are meant to give you tools to help your communication with one another.

Let's get started with the tools you will need to get your message across.

Speaker in the House—Ground Rules for  
Communicating Your Message

**Speaker Rule #1: Pick the right time**

While there is no perfect time to raise a difficult issue, there are more appropriate times than others. Use care in determining what those times may be. Try to pick a

time when you and your partner are free of other distractions. This time should be when both you and your partner can approach it positively and give your full attention. For example, this time is likely not during a favourite TV show, immediately upon coming home from work or during another scheduled activity. As the speaker, you can initiate the discussion by determining what the most appropriate time may be or simply asking your partner when is a good time to discuss this important issue.

### **Speaker Rule #2: How you Start will Determine How You will Finish**

The way the speaker raises an issue is often a big predictor of how the discussion will go. If you begin the conversation in a harsh way by attacking or blaming your partner, you are likely to have an angry discussion. It is important to avoid creating an atmosphere where the listener feels they need to defend themselves rather than simply discuss. In these cases, your message is not being heard because the listeners are too busy defending themselves. Softening the way and beginning the conversation with a calm, positive tone will increase the likelihood that your communication will be viewed as non-threatening. A non-threatening or safe communication environment will make the discussion seem worthwhile to the listener. Think of it as a “soft-beginning” where your words and tone are free of criticism or attack. Here are examples of harsh and soft beginnings.

Harsh Beginning—"You didn't put gas in the car and I was late for work this morning."

Soft Beginning—"I appreciate it when you put gas in my car but when you can't do that for me, let me know so I can make time to stop before work."

### **Speaker Rule #3: Speak for Yourself**

Stick to talking about how you, the speaker, feel. Also, describe the issue at hand for you, rather than stating what you may assume, think or observe to be the problem with your partner. Use the words "I" and "me" to describe things from your point of view. Beginning a conversation with "you" statements, can feel like an attack or attempt to blame the listener. Let's use the issue of housework as an example:

"I" statement—I get frustrated when I come home from work and the kitchen is messy. This statement conveys a feeling of frustration about a messy house.

"You" statements —You don't ever clean up after yourself. What have you been doing all day? This statement assigns blame on the listener for the messy house and attacks the listener by implying that they are lazy.

### **Speaker Rule #4: Be short and to the Point**

Try to tackle one issue at a time. Keep your point specific to the issues, observations or feelings and raise only those things that are happening currently. Do not include negative comments that attack the other. For

example, the following statement is an example of a personal attack: "You were such a jerk last night". A more positive alternative statement would be "My feelings were hurt last night when you left." It describes specific feelings as the result of an event. Explain your feelings and concerns simply and avoid the temptation to use long or drawn-out descriptions of things. Getting to the point gives the listener a manageable amount of information. It also provides them with a greater chance to show that they understand your point. Being brief keeps the listener engaged in the discussion and makes them less likely to "tune-out."

#### **Speaker Rule #5: It is Not Safe to Assume**

You might think that because a person knows you, they should know what you are thinking or feeling. Making assumptions is dangerous in any type of communication. It is up to you to tell the listener how you feel or how you observe a situation. What may be obvious to you, may not be so obvious to the listener. Communicate in specifics, using examples of situations if necessary. Give your listener a frame of reference for what you describe. Don't forget to begin the discussion gently and speak for yourself using "I" statements as described above [Rule #2 and #3], while keeping the issues simple and to the point.

#### **Speaker Rule #6: Stop, Pause, Listen**

After you have done your best to follow the rules to get your message across, be sure to let the listener paraphrase or summarize what you have said. The only

way to know that your listener accurately received your message is to pause and give the listener a chance to respond to you. This response should not include their opinion about what you have said. They should simply re-state, in their own words, what you just shared. It is not uncommon to learn that what we think we said was actually heard differently by the listener. Having the listener repeat what you have shared, gives you a chance to know whether your message went across. You can add corrections or clarifications [using the rules] if the listener describes something different than what you intended to communicate.

### **Speaker Rule #7: Move On**

Once you are sure your message was understood, you can choose your next option. If you are communicating a conflict, use the rules to develop a solution based on common ground—or things you can agree upon to improve the situation. You may be able to resolve an issue by simply discussing it or you may “agree to disagree”. If you identify a conflict that needs to be resolved, schedule a time to discuss it using the above skills

This does not necessarily mean that you fix the conflict, only that you both agree on ways that you can live with the conflict. At this, point you might need to repair hurt feelings, ask for forgiveness, or offer forgiveness. Do so in ways that your partner appreciates. Take time to do these things and once you have completed the process, move on.

Learning any new skill and incorporating these rules may seem silly or unnatural at first. The key is to continue to follow it and incorporate the techniques into your communication. Even practice the skills when things are going well in your relationship so that you will be prepared when attempting to use the rules during a conflict.

You may be wondering how you can be sure that these rules work in real situations. Experts in the healthy marriage arena have learned, after years of research with couples, to design the basis for the rules. They have used these techniques on literally thousands of couples. Also, by studying successful communication skills, not just failures, experts are able to translate these into strategies that people can use in their everyday lives.



## Dos and Don'ts When Discussing Answers

- ☒ Do stay focused on one answer at a time. Remember change takes time.
- ☒ Don't get defensive. That does not help resolve any issues.
- ☒ Do acknowledge your partner's feelings.
- ☒ Don't use guilt to get your way. It builds resentment and eventually backfires.
- ☒ Don't criticize your spouse.
- ☒ Do criticize the action or behaviour.
- ☒ Don't dismiss your spouse's feelings.
- ☒ Do listen to your spouse's concerns and offer to help.
- ☒ Don't give your partner the silent treatment.
- ☒ Don't have a "my way or the highway" attitude.
- ☒ Do approach each discussion as a team effort to find solutions.
- ☒ Don't make cruel statements.
- ☒ Do take time out if you feel emotionally charged.

## **Chapter Twelve: Anger Management**<sup>17</sup>

This chapter is about managing anger in a relationship. A lot has been written about the subject and the following chapter is adapted and quoted from the Mind Tools website, which is a great resource for discussions and tips on how to deal with work-related and relationships-related problems.

All of us experience anger from time to time. It is a normal, commonly experienced emotion.

However, anger can be incredibly destructive if we do not know how to control it. Frequent or misplaced anger can hurt our reputations, destroy our relationships, limit our opportunities and even damage our health.

### **Understanding Anger**

According to psychologist T.W. Smith, anger is "an unpleasant emotion ranging in intensity from irritation or annoyance to fury or rage."

Every day, we can experience things that could make us angry. Common causes include feelings of:

- Frustration.
- Hurt.
- Harassment.

- Injustice, regardless of whether real or perceived.

Other causes include:

- Requests or criticisms that we believe are unfair.
- Threats to people, things, or ideas that we hold dear.

People experience anger in different ways and for different reasons. Something that makes you furious may only mildly irritate someone else. This subjectivity can make anger difficult to understand and manage. It also highlights that your response to anger is up to you.

### **The Dangers of Anger**

An appropriate level of anger energizes us to take proper actions, solve problems and handle situations constructively.

However, uncontrolled anger leads to many negative consequences, especially in the workplace. For instance, it can damage relationships with our bosses and colleagues and it can lead people to lose trust and respect for us, especially when we react instantly and angrily to something that we have misperceived as a threat.

Anger also clouds our ability to make good decisions and find creative solutions to problems. This can negatively affect our work performance.

Frequent anger poses health risks too. One study found that people who get angry regularly are more likely to suffer from coronary heart disease, eating disorders and obesity. Research has also found a correlation between anger and premature death. Further studies have found that there is a link between anger and conditions such as anxiety and depression.

**Here are some tips from Jenna McCarthy of “Real Simple,” a lifestyle and wellness guide, to address your style of anger<sup>18</sup> (with some Islamic tips sprinkled in between!):**

#### **Anger Style: Explosive**

**What it looks like:** *"If you leave your jacket on the floor one more time, I'm leaving you!"* It may take a lot to push you over the edge but when you get there, the earth shakes and people run for cover.

**Why you might do it:** If you were never taught how to deal with irritation, you may habitually swallow it until you can swallow no more. Eventually, your top will blow. Some people are anger junkies, who get off on the adrenaline rush of an emotional explosion, not to mention the fact that the onslaught can mean they get their way—at least in the short term.

**The damage:** It is virtually impossible to feel empathy and anger simultaneously, so in the heat of the moment, you are more likely to say and do overly harsh things that you may later regret.

### **How to Turn It Around**

- **Wait it out.** "Research has shown that the neurological anger response lasts less than two seconds," says Ronald Potter-Efron, Ph.D., an anger-management specialist in Eau Claire, Wisconsin, and the co-author of *"Letting Go of Anger"*. Beyond that, it takes a commitment to stay angry. Mentally recite a surah from the Qur'an or even the Fatiha or count to ten and see if the urge to explode has diminished (McCarthy had originally noted that one should recite the US Pledge of Allegiance, but I have substituted a more Islamic alternative here).
- **Own your emotions.** A simple rephrasing of your feelings can help you feel more in control. "I'm really upset by your behaviour" is much more effective and empowering than %\*#@!.

### **Anger Style: Self-Abuse**

**What it looks like:** *"It's my fault he doesn't help me. I'm a terrible wife."* You find a way to make everything your fault, every single time.

**Why you might do it:** Somewhere along the line, your self-esteem took a beating and you decided that sometimes it is just safer and easier to be mad at yourself than at someone else.

**The damage:** Constantly turning angry feelings inward can set you up for continued disappointments and even depression.

### **How to Turn It Around**

- **Question yourself.** Every time you feel the urge to assume blame, start by asking yourself, "Who told me I was responsible for this?" Then ask, "Do I really believe that?" Instead of accepting all responsibility, thank yourself for recognizing the pattern in the first place.
- **Work on your self-worth.** Make a list of your positive qualities. Developing a genuine sense of worthiness is a critical step in overcoming self-blame. Seek out a professional if you need more help in working around this issue.

### **Anger Style: Avoidance**

**What it looks like:** *"I'm fine. It's fine. Everything's fine."* Even when there's a fireball of rage, burning in your gut, show a happy face and dodge any display of irritation. This is not passive aggression; it is buried aggression.

**Why you might do it:** "Women, in particular, are told over and over again to be nice no matter what. Get angry and you could lose your reputation, marriage, friends, or job," says Potter-Efron. If you grew up in a volatile or abusive home, you may not believe anger can be controlled or expressed calmly.

**The damage:** The primary function of anger is to signal that something is amiss and encourage resolution. By ignoring that warning sign, you may end up engaging in self-destructive behaviours (overeating, excessive shopping). You are also giving the green light to other people's bad behaviour or denying them the opportunity to make amends. How can they apologize if they don't even know you have been hurt?

### **How to Turn It Around**

- **Challenge your core beliefs.** Ask yourself, "Is it really fine for my partner not to help me around the house? Or to go out with his friends every weekend?" If you are honest, the resounding answer to these questions is probably "You know what? It is not fine. "Recognizing that something is wrong is the first step to setting it right.
- **Step outside yourself.** Imagine that a friend is the one being abused, overworked, or neglected. What would be the appropriate way for her to respond? Make a list of actions she

might take and then ask yourself why it is OK for her but not for you to react that way.

- **Embrace healthy confrontation.** Someone ticked you off? Tell the person—in a positive, constructive way. Yes, he or she might be surprised, possibly even (gasp!) angered by your words. And you know what? He or she will get over it. "Avoidance often does more damage to families and friendships than any expression of anger," says Potter-Efron.

### **Anger Style: Sarcasm**

**What it looks like:** *"It's OK that you're late. I had time to read the menu—40 times."* You find a roundabout way of getting your digs in, with a half-smile.

**Why you might do it:** You were probably raised to believe that expressing negative emotions directly is not OK, so you take a more indirect route. If folks get mad, it is their fault, not yours. After all, you were just kidding. Can't people take a joke?

**The damage:** Even though couched in wit, your sarcastic comments can damage your relationships. Although some people insist that mockery is a form of intellectual humour, the very word *sarcasm* is related to the Greek word *sarkazein*, meaning, "to tear flesh like dogs." Ouch.



## How to Turn It Around

- **Give it to them straight.** "Sarcasm is passive-aggressive communication," explains Todd. Find words to express how you feel head-on. You might explain to a tardy friend after you are seated by saying, "I wish you would try to be on time, especially when you know we have limited time."
- **Be firm and clear.** This is especially true with children when a gentle "Jumping on the furniture is not acceptable" sends a much clearer message than the snarky "Don't worry—we just happen to have \$2,000 set aside for a new sofa."
- **Speak up before you get bitter.** Exercising assertiveness prior to arriving at your breaking point can help prevent a sarcastic streak from popping out.

## Anger Style: Passive-Aggressive

**What it looks like:** *"Oops. Did I delete all those old basketball games from the TiVo?"* "You don't hide or swallow your anger but you express it in an underhanded way."

**Why you might do it:** You dislike confrontation but you are no pushover, either. "People become 'anger sneaks' when they believe they can't stand up to others," says

Potter-Efron. Some people who are cautious by nature turn to this style when they feel pushed outside their comfort zones.

**The damage:** You frustrate people. You're living your life around making sure other people don't get what they want, instead of striving for what makes you happy. The bottom line is: No one wins.

### **How to Turn It Around**

- **Give yourself permission to get angry.** Tell yourself that anger is your psyche's way of saying you are tired of being pushed around. A mantra: Assertiveness is fine; aggression (passive or otherwise) is not.
- **Advocate for yourself.** Instead of "forgetting" to turn in your report at work or showing up late to meetings, gather your courage and tell your boss that your workload has gotten too heavy or that you are having an issue with a co-worker. It won't be easy but neither is looking for another job.
- **Take control.** If you turn to passive aggression when you are uncomfortable with what is expected of you, it is important to do something to take the reins of your situation. Unable to manage the house or the finances solo? Rather than doing a haphazard job of it

(subconsciously, of course), tell your partner how important it is that he contributes.

### **Anger Style: Habitual Irritation**

**What it looks like:** *"I am sick and tired of having to do all the work around the house!"* This is often less a reaction to events and more a default option. It is always turned on unless you consciously turn it off.

**Why you might do it:** If your discontent dwells directly below the surface and is constantly seeping through, there is probably resentment, regret, or frustration boiling beneath. Maybe your co-worker got the promotion and you didn't or your marriage is falling apart and you are not sure why.

**The damage:** If you are always ready to blow, then friends, family, and coworkers may take great pains to avoid upsetting you. Or they may avoid you altogether. The most likely result is? No progress—you stay stuck in the same vicious cycle.

### **How to Turn It Around**

- **Get to the heart of it.** What are you really mad about? If you dig deep, you will realize it probably isn't about the housework or dirty socks on the floor or an empty milk carton in the refrigerator or any of the other small things that make you so frustrated. Consider

professional intervention if you can't get to the bottom of it on your own.

- **Tune in to anger clues.** Become aware of the actions and feelings associated with your irritation. When you are enraged, do you ball your hands into fists? Pace around the room? Grumble, swear or grit your teeth? As you identify and experience each physiological response, make a genuine effort to do something-- anything else.
- **Visualize peace.** Try this technique to stop becoming so angry that it overwhelms you. Imagine your breath as a wave, a surge of color or even a breeze. Watch it come in and out; optimally each breath will be deep and quiet. Hear yourself speaking calmly and softly to yourself and to others. Your anger reflex should diminish a little less each time you do this imaging.

### **Anger from an Islamic Perspective<sup>19</sup>:**

Let's now take a look at what the Islamic tradition has to say in terms of dealing with anger. Here, I've found it useful to use pages from the "Anger" section from "Islamic Awareness," a very useful website where these and related matters are discussed at length.

How many times have you shouted at your spouse (the

original Islamic Awareness page uses “parent” here but I feel like much of which is being discussed can also apply to our subject)? How many times have you felt so angry that you were just about to hit someone? Does this happen a lot? You are not the only one.

Many people are very often unable to control themselves and end up arguing with others, often with the ones they love - their parents, their brothers, their sisters, their husbands or wives. Here we are listing some reasons that stir people's anger and some suggestions from the Qur'an and Sunnah that can help you to control yourself.

When God created humanity, He created many emotions and desires within each person. We call them human instincts. These include positive qualities such as recognizing truth and expressing it, love and compassion or pure physiological desires such as thirst or hunger or the need for sex.

Then there are some negative qualities such as hate and anger, which result in violence and dejection.

Allaah says in the Qur'an:

*"And when your Lord said to the angels, 'I am creating successors on the earth.' They said, 'Will You create on it those who will spread corruption and spill blood, although we celebrate Your praise and extol Your Holiness?' He said, 'I know what you do not*

*know.'"* (Qur'an 2:30)

In addition, Allaah instilled some protective mechanisms for fighting these negative instincts.

Allaah says in Surah An-Nisa, Chapter 4, Verse 28: "*Man was created weak.*"

During the moment of weakness, we succumb to the designs of our enemy, that is, the devil, who "will attack us from front, from behind, from the side," to divert us from being conscious of God and return to our animistic nature. Thus, anger by itself is not unnatural; it is the expression of anger when done cruelly that can lead to problems. The difference between the wild beasts and wild humans is the difference of free will.

When a lion or a wolf is angry, he does not think. When a man becomes angry as a result of provocation, he has the choice to control his anger or to respond to it as he has learned from the Qur'an and from the Prophet's (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) teachings or forget all that and become a wild animal. Thus, anger takes place when we are not in control of ourselves and the devil is controlling us. Anger in itself is a natural feeling. Allaah has put such feelings inside us to react against what is harming us, for instance, to protect our lives, our properties, and our families. Yet we should not overdo that. Meaning it is ok to feel angry but it is dangerous and forbidden by Allaah to surrender to your

anger and follow it to as far as it takes you (for it might even drive you to kill somebody).

Anger is a destabilizing thought. It is the most dividing emotion between friends; it takes away judgment, leads to depression and wrong actions that we will repent later when we are not angry. But why do we get angry to begin with? It is either an unexpected provocation or an unexpected situation that leads to frustration and an angry response.

During anger, one can physically or verbally abuse a person he or she loves or hurt another living being like an animal and during the dejected phase of anger, one can even hurt himself or herself and even commit suicide. The Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) gave us the medicine for that by saying:

*"Shake hands and rancor will disappear. Give gifts to each other and love each other and enmity will disappear." Al-Muwatta, Volume 47, Hadith 16*

The Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) also said:

*"A strong person is not the person who throws his adversaries to the ground. A strong person is the one who contains himself when he is angry." Narrated by Abu Huraira and agreed upon by Al-Bukhari/Muslim*

The point is that the natural fulfillment of normal desires, whether in terms of food or sex is a prerequisite for prevention of anger. There are many chemicals and hormones, which affect our mood and behaviour. It is well known that hypoglycaemia and hyperthyroidism precipitate irritability when one is feeling angry. We must keep our hormones in balance in addition to facilitating our spiritual well-being.

After all, we Muslims are the followers of Prophet Mohammad (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him), right? What better example of patience do we have than that of our own blessed Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) himself?

Prophet Mohammad (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him), who was sent to teach humankind good moral conduct, learned to control his anger toward the Unbelievers and teach them appropriate reactions. He used to speak against being angry. We think that we have it tough when one of his days was probably tougher than the whole of our lifetime! When we look at his life, our own difficulties seem so insignificant in comparison. Imagine spending 13 long years completely devoting his life to spreading the word of Islam and suffering hardship. This was a man who had the burden of the whole of humankind's future on his shoulders. Yet he had the tolerance and self-discipline to be able to forgive the ignorant ones around him.



The best example of this was when the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) went to a place called Ta'if. This was at the time when the followers of Islam were at their weakest and the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) himself had suffered the loss of both his wife Khadijah (may Allaah be pleased with her) and his uncle Abu Talib. He went to this town in the hope that they would listen to what he had to say. Instead, he was insulted and chased out of the town by the children who threw stones at him till (it was described) blood flowed from his body to his feet making his sandals sticky. The Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) was so depressed that he prayed to Allaah, who then sent down the Angel of the Mountains. The Angel asked for the Prophet's (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) permission to fold the mountains together and crush to death all those who lived there. But what was the Prophet's (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) reply? "Yes, kill them all as they did not listen to me"? No, of course not! His answer was "No, I hope Allaah will bring from them people who will worship Allaah alone, associating none with Him."

This was the example of the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him), even though he felt bitterness and anger, he had the discipline and control to not let his emotions control his actions. He forgave them realizing that they were merely misguided.

One companion asked him, "Give me some advice by virtue of which I hope for good in the life hereafter," and he said, "Don't be angry." Another person asked, "What will save me from the wrath of God?" And he said, "Do not express your anger." A third person asked three times, "O Messenger of Allaah, give me an order to do a short good deed," and he said, "Don't be angry." Narrated by Abu Huraira, Sahih Al-Bukhari.

Once he asked a question of his companion, "Who among you do you consider to be a strong person?" They said, "The one who can defeat so-and-so wrestler in a fight," and he said, "That is not so. The one who is strong is the one who can control himself at the time of anger." Riyadh As-Saleheen, agreed upon by Al-Bukhari/Muslim.

He also said that anger is like fire, which destroys you from within and can lead you to the fire of hell when you express your anger unjustly. [Narrated by Anas ibn Malik RA/Morsal]

So being angry is similar to being drunk. In both cases, we do not know what we are doing, often hurting ourselves or someone else. Afterwards, when the intoxication is over, we repent.

Sheikh Hassan Al Basri said that one of the signs of the Believers is that his anger does not prevail over him.

One should distinguish between natural response and wrongdoing and disbelief. A person who has no feelings

about oppression, wrongdoing, and disbelief is, in fact, an impotent person emotionally. It has been said, "Evil flourishes when a few good people do not do anything to oppose it." Thus, response to injustice and operation in a civilized way is the appropriate expression of anger. Being neutral to injustice is equal to contributing to injustice.

Caliph Ali was once fighting in a war imposed on Muslims and the chief of the disbelievers confronted him. During the fight, Ali was able to overcome him and he was about to kill him. This person, knowing his fate now, had no choice so he spit on the face of Ali. Ali immediately got up and left him alone. The man came running to him and asked, "You had the chance to kill me since I am a Polytheist; how come you didn't use your sword?" Ali said, "I have no personal animosity toward you. I was fighting you on behalf of God because you are a disbeliever. If I had killed you after you spat on my face, then it would have become my personal revenge which I do not wish to take." That disbeliever chief became a Muslim immediately and testified that "There is no god but Allaah and that Prophet Mohammad (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) is the Messenger of Allaah."

When Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) became angry at someone else's wrong actions or disbeliefs, he never expressed it with his hand or tongue. His companions knew that he was angry just by

looking at his face, which would turn red and with some sweat on his forehead and he would keep quiet for a moment, trying to control himself.

### **What happens to us physiologically when we are angry?**

Our heartbeat increases and blood pressure goes up; this is a direct effect of excessive adrenalin in our system. Our physical strength increases although spiritual strength decreases. Our intellect or power to reason disappears and things we would not justify in a normal state become acceptable.

### **How can we defeat anger?**

To root out anger is impossible and unnatural and may even be harmful. But what we should do is to control this feeling and not let it lead us to what is wrong and forbidden in our religion (Islam).

My first advice would be to avoid becoming so sensitive that it makes you "deaf, dumb and mute." For some people getting engaged diverts their attention away from anger, which can be useful. For others, engaging in remembrance of God or meditation might work but most common folks need some worldly tools.

Prophet Mohammad (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) advises us that when angry, one should try to change his body position. Meaning, if you are standing

up, sit down and if you are sitting down stand up. If this does not work, then go and wash and get prepared for praying.

When you are angry, think of Allaah. Think of Allaah's anger and punishment. Is Allaah's wrath less than your wrath? And what happens when He expresses His wrath? We humans who seek forgiveness from Allaah, must forgive others first. When one forgives someone, it establishes peace and tranquility in one's heart.

The first attribute of Allaah that we Muslims are reminded (of) is Ar-Rahman-Ar Rahim that is, Kind and Merciful. God Himself said, "My mercy overtakes my wrath," and He told us in one of the Hadith Qudusi, "O son of Adam, when you get angry, remember Me." Thus, remembrance of God and meditation will put us on the right track. One of the words we use for meditation is "Ya Halim" (Patient), which is one of the attributes of God, the "Mild One." One can also pray to God to take control. We must also think that our life, that is so dear to us, is a temporary life and we must not forget our death and destroy the life of eternity at the cost of this life. Washing one's face with cold water or taking a cold shower is also helpful.

That is how the saying, "turn the other cheek" came about. One will become a calm person when he makes peace with himself, Allaah, and his surroundings. Anger is a costly weed; it costs one his health, life in this

world, and the life in the Hereafter. This weed must be rooted out to allow the healthy plant of righteousness, piety and obeying Allaah to nurture and grow. Also, anger is one of the weapons of Satan, we should be careful that we do not fall prey to his weapons, rather we should protect ourselves by being patient.

### **Dealing With the Silent Treatment in Relationships<sup>20</sup>**

Here, I've found it useful to look at some of the tips and insights that are given by the noted lifestyle and relationships blogger, Laurie Pawlik-Kienlen, whose points are very salient and relevant to our discussion.

The silent treatment is the most common pattern of conflict in marriage or any committed romantic relationship. The following tips will help you to undo some of the damage it causes.

Taken too far, the silent treatment is emotional abuse – and it is definitely one of the causes of problems in a relationship. The tips in this article on dealing with the silent treatment are geared towards couples in romantic relationships but can be applied to all types of partnerships: work, school, family, or even neighbours.

The silent treatment is part of what is called a “demand-withdraw” pattern in a relationship. It happens when one partner pressures the other with requests, criticism or complaints and is met with avoidance or silence.

Below are the results of a research study on the silent treatment in relationships, plus tips on dealing with it.

Research from Paul Schrodtt, Ph.D. at Texas Christian University shows that couples engaged in demand-withdraw pattern experience lower relationship satisfaction, less intimacy, and poorer communication. This professor and graduate director of communication studies also found that the damage caused by the silent treatment could be both emotional and physical.

And, believe it or not, the silent treatment is associated with anxiety and aggression as well as physiological effects such as urinary, bowel or erectile dysfunction.

### **What is the silent treatment?**

The silent treatment occurs when someone – your partner, best friend and family member – ignores you and refuses to speak to you. It is a very hard pattern to break but my tips for dealing with the silent treatment will help you get started. They will also help you see your partner's behaviour in a different light.

“Couples get locked in this pattern, largely because they each see the other as the cause,” says, Schrodtt in “What the Silent Treatment Says About Your Relationship.

“Both partners see the other as the problem.” The first tip for dealing with it is to take responsibility for your part in the problem.

Ask the wife, who, research shows, is more often the demanding partner in relationships – and she will complain that her husband is closed off and emotionally unavailable. Ask the husband and he will say, “I will open up if she would just back off.”

### **Dealing With the Silent Treatment in Relationships**

The silent treatment is when someone you love refuses to acknowledge you or talk to you, no matter what you say or do. It is frustrating and hurtful and is a form of emotional manipulation and control. It is an immature way to deal with hurt feelings – but if you know how to deal with the silent treatment in relationships, you can protect yourself.

The silent treatment came from early cultures long ago when ostracism or being expelled was a form of punishment. Even today, not being included in a group or community is a terrible thing to experience. In early cultures, being ostracized meant almost certain death because people could not live without the protection of a society.

Today, the silent treatment is not about physical life or death but it can affect the longevity and health of your relationship. That is another reason to learn why dealing with the silent treatment in relationships is so important. It can make or break your bond with your partner.

### **Learn why your partner uses the silent treatment**



Sometimes people can't express their thoughts or feelings, so they clam up. Other times their emotions – anger, hurt, fear – are so strong that they simply can't talk. Sometimes, people feel that they are not a match for their partner verbally, so they shut down. The silent treatment can be a way for your partner to protect himself or herself. In reality, the silent treatment is a form of bullying and it is often used to get what is wanted in the relationship. This type of passive aggressive communication might be what your partner learned as a child – it might be how your partner controlled his or her world.

Why do you think your partner uses the silent treatment in your relationship? Understanding the reasons behind his or her behaviour can help you move forward in your relationship.

### **Talk about the silent treatment with your partner**

Of course, you can't deal with the silent treatment when your partner is not talking to you but you can bring it up after the storm has passed. Tell him or her how much you care about them and how important they are to you. Share how it feels when you get the silent treatment and how it affects your relationship. You might even discuss other examples of verbal abuse in relationships, so your partner sees how serious it is.

Avoid “giving back as you get” when you are at the receiving end. It does not help to deal with the silent

treatment in relationships by giving the silent treatment right back to your partner. This just increases hostility and negative feelings and puts more of a wall between both of you.

### **Accept your partner's unwillingness to talk**

A sister once said,

"I am embarrassed to admit that I am guilty of giving the silent treatment to my husband. It seemed like a good idea at the time – it seemed to be an appropriate way to deal with him! But it is not appropriate. It is actually very harmful to a relationship, even though it seems like "just" the silent treatment."

One of the best tips for dealing with the silent treatment in relationships is to ignore it. Walk away and leave your partner alone during an actual episode of the silent treatment. If you sweet talk, beg or threaten your partner while he or she is giving you the silent treatment, you will only make it worse. It is better to just let your partner's anger and childishness continue to run its course. Eventually, he/she will come back to you, ready to end the argument and start talking again.

### **Learn the pattern of the silent treatment in your relationship**

Sometimes people who give the silent treatment need their partners to make the first move. After you have given your partner time to cool down, maybe you have

to be the first to apologize. It doesn't seem fair but often the giver of the silent treatment is the one who needs to be approached.

What is the pattern of the silent treatment in your relationship? If you can identify it, then you are in a better position to deal with it. If your partner needs two days to cool off, then don't approach her/him before that. If your partner refuses to talk until you apologize first, then you need to meet her/him where she/he is at – if you want to stay in this relationship.

### **Quick tips for dealing with the silent treatment in relationships**

Remember that getting more talkative or vocal when you are getting the silent treatment won't help your relationship. Here are a few strategies for dealing with the silent treatment with someone you love:

### **Dealing With the Silent Treatment in Relationships**

- Remind yourself that the problem can't be solved until your partner tells you what is wrong. It is not up to you to fix the problem.
- Don't try to read your partner's mind – it is impossible!
- Don't give back the silent treatment

- When she is ready to talk (in the case of a wife), let your partner know that you care about her and want to know why she is upset.
- Invite your partner to explain what is bothering her when she is ready
- Don't engage. Don't play your part of the game. Instead, go about your business and try not to get angry. She will eventually have to change her behaviour.

I know these tips for dealing with the silent treatment in relationships are easier said than done! But if you can stay emotionally healthy when you are faced with the silent treatment, you are more likely to deal with it the right way.

### **An Islamic Perspective<sup>21</sup>**

Now, for an Islamic take on how to deal with “the silent treatment,” it’s useful to look at the writings of Nasiha Ahmad, whose article for “IslamWeb” has a lot of useful points.

When someone says something mean to us, we are told that we should “turn the other cheek.” When we are angry and we are aching to say something mean to someone, we are told that if we don’t have something nice to say, we shouldn’t say anything at all. We are taught to bite our lips and hold our tongues whenever we feel anger brewing with frustration and resentment;

silence is better than lashing out. We are taught from a young age that silence is golden.

There comes a time when silence can sting more than the bite of even the harshest words or the wound from the sharpest knives. When silence is fuelled by rage and held over by a grudge, it is lethal. Unfortunately, many women know this “silent treatment” all too well. Admittedly, many women have experienced this silent treatment from both ends—the receiving end and the giving end.

The silent treatment simply means: abstinence from speech. This is more than often accompanied by a cold, malicious, or indifferent air that begets not only a mere lack of words but also the intent to neglect or hurt.

### **Silence between spouses**

Men and women handle conflict differently. While most men may get angry and storm out of the house, yell or raise their voices, women tend to shut down and clam up. Many of them resort to the silent treatment. When things don't go the way a wife may want them to, she may decide that, rather than fighting with her husband, she will choose to avoid him, ignore him, and refuse to talk to him. She gives him the cold shoulder, rolls her eyes at him, all the while maintaining order in the house, taking care of the children, cooking meals, etc. How is this possible? Oh, it is possible and it probably happens in many households.

Someone once gave me some premarital advice: “Don’t have any expectations.” What she meant was: if we have expectations and they don’t come to fruition, we will be disappointed and upset. Then we will lash out in one way or the other. Most women don’t “lash out” with words, they withdraw and “expect” that the other person should just know what is wrong.

Take the example of a routine wedding anniversary. A woman might “expect” something special but her husband may be pragmatic and present her with something practical or worse yet, nothing at all. Now, she is not speaking to him. He doesn’t understand why. Most of the women who know her, know exactly what she is feeling; many who are reading this may even have experienced this situation.

The problem arises when incidents like the one above happen and we shut down and stop talking. We get angry and instead of explaining ourselves or demanding an explanation, we pout and expect that our husbands should have known better. But this silent treatment is poisonous to a marriage. It is like an iceberg between a husband and wife; it creates a rift between them that even if time repairs it, another rift arises and the new one seems even greater and wider than the first. Because, once a woman gets into the habit of using the silent treatment, it becomes her easiest and most common weapon of choice. And it is this weapon that she may use in all her dealings with all her other relationships as well.

## **Spiteful Silence Among Sisters**

Women are known to have the ability to share the strongest of bonds with each other. They can be the dearest of friends, maintaining everlasting friendships that endure years of happiness and tears. But during those times, some of those friendships encounter episodes of breakup. Unlike other breakups that might result in arguments and fights, many breakups in adult female relationships end due to the simple but significant silent treatment. This lack of speech speaks volumes in that it says more than words ever could. A woman knows that being overlooked or ignored by a friend is far worse than a battle of words.

Recall a time for instance when you might have been in school (high school or college) and suddenly some of your friends decided that they didn't want to be your friends anymore. They began to ignore you and shrugged off everything that you said. What you said and what you did made no difference; they didn't care about you anymore and you didn't know why. Perhaps it was because you offered one friend help with her homework but not the other or maybe you called one girlfriend the night before but not the other. It could be anything or really nothing at all. The reason is insignificant but the consequences are astronomical as the silent treatment is detrimental to all involved.

### **A double-edged sword**

Silent treatment is a double-edged sword: the one who remains silent and the one who bears the silence both suffer. Obviously, the one who is made to bear the silence is “punished” because she is shunned, ignored, neglected and overlooked. That person ironically becomes de-objectified; it is almost as if she no longer exists. She is made to feel invisible and possibly worthless or at the very least not worthy of being friends with the other person in question.

At the other end of the sword, the one doling out the punishment suffers (even if she doesn’t realize it at the time), because giving someone the silent treatment would require perseverance, dedication, and persistence for something mean, spiteful and vengeful— no good could result from that. This kind of silent treatment would drain a person’s emotional energy. Being mean to someone that you claim to care about, takes some getting used to. Though we may convince ourselves that we don’t care but in our heart of hearts, we too (as the giver of the silent treatment) would have to acknowledge the loss of this friendship.

In other words, it takes a lot of work and effort to ignore someone so consistently; it is not easy to hurt someone so deeply without saying a word or raising a hand. Great effort must be exerted in making sure that the recipient knows that we are ignoring her, that we are avoiding her.



The danger lies in how long we may continue this grudge that fuels our silence. If we get used to being silent and ignoring a particular friend long enough, that friend no longer remains a friend and we can officially say that we have lost her. Here lies our demise. Islam actually outlines a three-day limit after which that anger must subside. Then, the two estranged people must greet each other again: “It is not permissible for a Muslim to be estranged from his brother for more than three days, both of them turning away from one another when they meet. The better of them is the one who is first to greet the other.” [Al-Bukhari]

According to the above Hadith, one would assume that the two parties are in conflict but with the silent treatment, most often only one party has an issue with the other. Even in such cases, the ruling would likely apply; either the one being ignored should try to make amends with the woman who is angry and try to get her to speak in order to figure out what exactly is wrong or the one who is silent should finally speak and make peace with her friend before it is too late.

The Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) said, *“Whoever forsakes his brother for a year, it is as if he has shed his blood.”* [Al-Bukhari] Can we imagine this happening in our own lives? Of course, if enough time has elapsed and we haven’t spoken with someone for long enough, a year could easily go by before you know it. In fact, it is quite easy. If someone began the silent treatment with you, in the beginning you might

try to figure out why but if this is of no avail, you would probably give up trying and just think, “Oh well, if she doesn’t want to talk to me or be my friend, then forget about it.” And then you really would forget about it, as she might do, too. But that would probably be a friendship lost for a potentially petty reason and with a potentially potent consequence, given the above Hadith. In most books, it is not worth it.

## **THE SOLUTION**

1. Find a solution! Rather than giving the silent treatment or allowing someone to give it to you, identify and solve the problem instead of perpetuating it. Talk things through and come to some sort of solution, compromise or agreement.
2. If you can never have a discussion again to actually work it out (let us be realistic; sometimes, it really just doesn’t work out), then at least try to be “the bigger person” and say your *salam*s first. Then you can walk away civilly without any feelings of guilt.
3. Don’t start. Avoid giving anyone the silent treatment in the first place. For some, it is hard not to but try to avoid being silent and rather just say what is on your mind instead of shutting someone out of your life. If we can nip a problem before it grows into a big one by discussing it, we can avoid having to give anyone the silent treatment.

## **Chapter Thirteen: The Dreaded “D-Word”<sup>22</sup>**

Even though divorce is halal in Islam and could be the solution in your situation, we should do our best to learn about it and be proactive in solving our marriage problems so we don't have to go down that road.

The following section is adapted and quoted from a discussion on divorce at the Couples Counselling Center.

Understanding the reasons for divorce requires you to suspend any preconceived notions about why they happen. Many people mistakenly believe that most marriages end almost exclusively because of infidelity.

While this certainly is a major factor, the decision to terminate a marriage is much more complicated. According to a variety of marriage-related studies, there are a number of other causes that may surprise you.

After doing considerable research on this topic, the relationship experts at the *Couples Counseling Center* are ready to present our top 10 reasons for divorce. The information listed here comes from different forms of scientific research, combined with input from counsellors and therapists who specialize in marriage therapy.

At the end of this page, we have included a reason for getting divorce poll for you to vote as a way of communicating your thoughts about why marriages end. Are you ready? Let's jump right in!

## **The Top 10 Reasons for Divorce**

### **1. Married too fast**

Simply put, many couples get married *too* fast and *too* soon. This happens when two people get hooked on the look and overlook fundamental differences between one another. For example, an extrovert and an introvert may have completely different ideas about what constitutes “together time”. When people rush into a marriage without getting to know one another in the lawful means, there is a high risk of marital failure. Lack of shared interest also happens when expectations are too high.

### **2. Communication breakdowns**

This is a primary reason many marriages end in divorce. After a period of time, couples commonly enter into a routine of caustic communication. If not watched carefully, toxic patterns can set in that result in one or both parties withdrawing from meaningful conversation in the marriage. Worse, these avoidant patterns can turn into negative communication when forced. This pattern is most prominent during and after disagreements.

### **3. Cheating and infidelity**

There is no question about it – cheating and marital infidelities are major reasons people get divorced. These kinds of outside relationship (that end marriages)

happen more than you might think. Research suggests up to 41% of people engage in some form of physical or emotional infidelity. And if you think men do it more than women, think again. The research suggests that acts of infidelity between the genders are almost evenly split.

#### **4. Bedroom boredom**

Another major reason why marriages fail relates to boredom in the bedroom. At the beginning of almost all relationships, sexual energy is fairly high. As the relationship goes on and time passes, that energy can wax and wane. If not watched closely, intimacy in the bedroom can wither. This is one of the primary reasons people engage in spousal cheating.

#### **5. Loss of autonomy**

When a couple initially decides to marry, it is not uncommon for both parties to hold grandiose visions about the future. Often lost in the equation are relational roles, which impact one or both person's level of autonomy. Research conducted on breakups and divorce suggests that 24% of men felt a lack of autonomy in their relationship and women around 44%.

The ability to be with someone while also maintaining a sense of independence is a key ingredient for a successful, long-term marriage. It is for this reason couples are encouraged to engage

in premarital counselling as a way of exploring the topic of autonomy before getting hitched.

## **6. Money and financial issues**

This particular reason for divorce should not come as a surprise to you. The truth is that money is a major problem in many marriages. In fact, the majority of divorce-related surveys suggest money is one of the biggest reasons couples split.

Even long-standing couples have found their marriage in trouble because of strong disagreements about spending, savings and general financial decision-making. Financial inequity when someone brings more to the table can also be a major reason behind divorce.

## **7. Alcohol and drugs**

Believe it or not, alcohol and drug use are a major reason why many marriages end. In one study, it was reported that as many as 45% of couples decide to split because of alcohol or drug dependency issues.

Abuse of alcohol and drugs in marriages can cause a host of other problems including financial and emotional difficulties. Substance abuse can also lead to heated arguments and in some cases physical violence.

## **8. Lack of romance**

Romance is a construct that can be hard to understand. At its core, we are talking about having some level of passion in the relationship that goes beyond mere physical closeness. The research suggests that women want their husbands to make them feel special in some way. Men, on the other hand, prefer some form of admiration from their wives. A lack of romance can sometimes be traced to a fear of intimacy, which may not become immediately apparent during the initial stages of a relationship.

## **9. Differences in background**

This point in many ways relates to reason #1. Many marriages end because of fundamental differences in background. These differences can be cultural, familial and economic. Because some couples decide to marry too quickly, they can often overlook major differences that exist between them. This is particularly true regarding spiritual and religious beliefs.

## **10. Boredom with other person**

A lack of excitement about a spouse is our final reason many couples get divorced. Simply put, when one or both parties in the relationship believe their marriage is no longer fun or no longer interesting, withdrawal and drifting can occur.

As you might imagine, this can also cause a spouse to have a wandering eye that may result in cheating. Boredom can also spark conversations about having an open marriage, which some spouses turn to as a way of salvaging their marriages.

### **Reasons for Divorce Summary**

Our ten reasons for why marriages end in divorce are by no means exhaustive. There are a host of other factors that can impact a relational dynamic and lead to marital collapse. Our list covered the “biggies.” Many couples find themselves wondering *should we break up* as a result of ongoing relationship problems.

Marriage counselling can certainly help to provide answers.

One useful tool that you may want to consider as a way of assessing the general health of your relationship is to complete our marriage report card. While unscientific, this resource can help you to better understand where things stand in your marriage and why you need to focus on your strengths and weaknesses.

### **An Islamic Perspective:<sup>23</sup>**

Now, for a more Islamic perspective on this matter, I would like to share this Sound Vision article, which features a lot of advice from Dr. Muzammil Siddiqi, President of the Islamic Society of North America (ISNA), particularly when it comes to reasons for considering divorce.



The divorce rate in North America is one of the highest in the world (over 50 percent). But the divorce rate of Muslims in North America is almost as high, according to a New York-based sociologist Ilyas Ba-Yunus.

Yes, it's true. Muslims today are divorcing in larger numbers than before. There are clearly problems within families that have not been addressed: dysfunction, miscommunication and, in a number of cases, violence and abuse.

But while Muslims are taking this step in larger numbers, what does Islam have to say about it?

### **The Islamic perspective on divorce**

"Divorce is something that is very much discouraged in Islam," explains Dr. Muzammil Siddiqi, president of the Islamic Society of North America (ISNA).

"It is called, according to one of the Hadith of the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) 'the most hateful thing that is permissible.'"

This stance discouraging divorce needs to be seen in a balanced way, notes Siddiqi.

"It has to be used very carefully," he says.

**What are some legitimate reasons for a couple to consider divorce?**

There are definitely valid reasons for which Muslim men and women can seek divorce.

"One legitimate reason is if there is immoral behaviour, un-Islamic behaviour on the part of a spouse," says Siddiqi. "If a spouse is involved in that, then there is a breakdown."

"For example, if one of the spouses, God forbid, is involved in adultery or fornication. In that case, they have a right to separate and this is a legitimate ground for separation."

Another valid reason for divorce is apostasy on the part of either spouse. If a Muslim man or woman's spouse leaves Islam, Siddiqi says the marriage is null and void and the couple can no longer be together.

Sheikh Abdalla Idris Ali is a member of ISNA's executive body and former president of the organization. He adds to the list that dishonesty prior to marriage is a reason for seeking divorce.

For instance, if a husband told his wife before marriage that he does not consume alcohol or drugs and she discovers after marriage that he is an alcoholic or drug addict.

Some other reasons are:

- a woman was married before and she did not tell her husband

- a woman marries a man who is impotent and she finds out after marriage.
- cruelty
- a man's inability or refusal to support his wife
- a wife's refusal to live with her husband or be with him.
- if one of the spouses is unable to have conjugal relations
- One spouse feels repulsion towards the other.

Ali, however, cautions against jumping to divorce quickly and adds that every case has to be looked at individually.

"It is one thing to speak about a ruling. It is another thing to speak about a judgement in a certain case," he says in an interview with Sound Vision and RadiolIslam.com.

"If you ask me now, what is the ruling in Islam for a young man who commits Zina (adultery and fornication)? I'll tell you Allaah says, give him 100 lashes. This is what the Qur'an says.

"But you bring me a man and say, this man committed Zina. I'm not going just to give him 100 lashes. This is a case. I have to investigate it, to see whether he did it. You cannot just go and apply the rule."

## **Illegitimate reasons to seek divorce**

Along with legitimate reasons for seeking divorce, Siddiqi and Ali also point to those reasons that are not so acceptable.

Siddiqi gives the example of a husband not liking the way a wife cooks or dresses.

"One should not expect perfection on the part of the spouse because nobody's perfect except Allaah and His Messenger. Everybody has shortcomings."

"One should show willingness to sacrifice some of the things," he adds. "This is how the family is established and how it becomes a better family."

"Another reason that should not be grounds for divorce is just moodiness on the part of a spouse," says Ali.

## **What can couples do to avoid divorce?**

Siddiqi recommends the following steps for couples who are in difficulty:

1. Both spouses should have the fear of Allaah. They should remember that if they are unfair to their spouse, they will be judged on their behaviour by Allaah.
2. They should try to resolve the problem within themselves, then with family members.
3. They should not hesitate to involve other members of

the community. For instance, they should not feel ashamed or embarrassed to meet and speak with their local Imam (if he is someone fair and trustworthy to the husband and the wife).

4. Seek counselling, preferably from a Muslim counsellor. If that is not possible, seek counselling from a non-Muslim counsellor. However, they should be aware of Islamic guidelines so they can give advice that is in line with Islamic values.

"As physically we can get sick, our relations also can get sick sometimes," says Siddiqi. The sooner we take care of this problem the better. We should not prolong it. We should resolve the differences as soon as possible and as much as possible. But when problems go on and on, then the wounds will grow."

Siddiqi recommends that Muslim couples should draft a prenuptial agreement and specify that all conflicts in marriage would be resolved Islamically and in the case of a divorce, if it happens, it will also be handled in a manner that is consistent with Islamic guidelines.

## **Chapter Fourteen: Money Matters<sup>24</sup>**

One aspect of a bad marriage is tension over the finances. I'd like to share an article from *Forbes* magazine, a leading business outlet, which I think provides a good overview of this issue. It's one of the most stressful aspects that add to a bad marriage, so let's take a look!

### **10 Ways to Prevent Money From Ruining Your Marriage**

It is no secret that fighting about money puts a huge strain on a relationship.

Money issues are so troublesome that people who say they are experiencing stress in their relationship cite finances as the number one reason — easily beating out the second place contender: annoying habits, according to a study by SunTrust. Money issues are also responsible for 22% of all divorces, making it the third leading cause, according to the Institute for Divorce Financial Analysis.

This may seem like a grim prognosis for married couples but it does not have to be. There are various steps that experts say couples can take to avoid letting money matters get the best of their marriage. So whether you are about to say "I do" or money problems have you thinking maybe "I don't anymore" the following tips can help prevent money from destroying your relationship.

## **1. Don't set yourself up for disaster**

"Of all the couples that I see, the number one mistake they make is spending too much on the wedding," says legal expert Ann-Margaret Carrozza, who specializes in personal finance.

The average cost of a wedding is more than \$26,000 and if you live in a metropolitan area like Toronto, it is almost three times that. "Most couples can't afford to pay cash for their marriage, so they go into debt to pay for this one day celebration," she added, "for many young couples this is more than student loan and credit card debt. So they are literally drowning in debt out of the gate."

While this does not mean couples need to forego wedding festivities, those with limited budgets should do something smaller or find other ways to make the wedding more affordable and save the big party for the fifth or tenth anniversary when they are in a better financial position.

## **2. Discuss your demons**

Experts agree that you should fully disclose your financial situation with your significant other before tying the knot, regardless of how uncomfortable it may be. This is the time to mention outstanding debts, loans, income sources, investments or other financial assets or obligations. (If you are already married and still withholding this info, now is the time to bring it up).

If you are in a second or third marriage and you have alimony or child support payments or even if you expect to provide financial support to aging parents or adult children in the future, that is something you need to address as early as possible.

### **3. Understand your partner's money mindset**

“A lot of the fights between spouses that seem as though they are about money aren't about [money] at all. It is actually a clash of temperaments,” says Matt Bell, associate editor at [Sounmindinvesting.com](http://Sounmindinvesting.com) and author of the book *Money and Marriage*.

“Temperament is a huge potential source of conflict,” he says adding, one person may be upset that their spouse is spending too much but the issue may not be just that they can't afford it but it may be something deeper such as a real fear of not being able to pay their bills someday.

Michelle Perry Higgins, principal of California Financial Advisors and author of various financial books, says it is also important to have an understating of how your spouse views money and how they were raised around money. “Were their parent's frugal or big spenders? Did you live on a budget? Did your parents talk about money or was it a taboo subject? What is your spouse's greatest fear with their finances? All of these answers



will play into a marriage and explain how that partner treats money today.”

If you are unsure how to approach this subject with your spouse, suggest taking an online “money personality” quiz. For example, Money Harmony offers a free quiz that determines whether you are a hoarder, spender, money monk, avoider, or amasser. These types of quizzes are a fun way to get the conversation started and add some levity to what could be a tense topic.

#### **4. Set your eyes on the (same) prize**

Life happens and things change, so it is not unusual for people’s financial expectations and priorities to shift as time goes by. The problem is when couples forget to check in with each other to make sure they are still on the same page.

“It’s a good reality check for a couple to sit down once a year, no matter where they are on the financial spectrum and discuss what they are working toward,” Carrozza says, whether it is a vacation home, paying off debt or saving more for retirement.

She adds that having goals aligned is especially important for couples with only one income-generating spouse. Often the non-working spouse feels guilty about not contributing financially or the working spouse may feel resentful that the money they earn is not being spent prudently. Carrozza says that making sure

both partners have the same goal in mind is essential. She adds that it can also be helpful if the spouse that is not working does something on the side to generate some money, even if it is just a small amount here and there. It can be anything from selling items on eBay, having a garage sale or taking online surveys. “It doesn’t matter what the amount of money is as once that spouse starts to earn some on their own, they will feel more powerful.”

## **5. Don’t ignore the “B word”**

There is no sexy way to say it: you need to have a household budget. It is the most effective way to keep track of your money. However, only around 32% of people have one, according to a Gallup poll.

Budgeting may seem tedious, but having one can yield significant benefits, not least of which is preventing the marital turmoil that arises when one or both spouses are in the dark about where their money is going.

The good news is that technology has made budgeting a lot easier with the proliferation of online tools and apps that track your accounts and spending for you. One of the most popular programs, which many financial advisors applaud, is Mint — a program that lets you create a budget and automatically track your accounts and transactions so you can see how you are progressing. Mint also categorizes your purchases to give you a better idea of how you are spending your

money. There are a lot of other great programs as well (in addition to numerous websites that review them) so it is worth looking into the program that works best for you.

## **6. Stop Keeping Secrets**

Keeping secrets from your spouse can put you on the fast track to marital mayhem. Unfortunately, it is not uncommon, especially when it comes to keeping secrets about money. Roughly six million consumers in the U.S. (about 7% of the country's population) have concealed financial accounts such as checking accounts, savings accounts or credit cards from their spouses, partners or significant others they live with, according to a poll by CreditCards.com. Almost 20% have secretly spent \$500 or more without telling their partner.

"So many couples are hiding money or debt or charges and when the spouse finds out, it's war in their marriage," Perry Higgins says. In a survey conducted by Moneysupermarket.com, 1 in 10 people said their secret credit card purchases led to a break-up or divorce.

While no one should be micromanaged or expected to disclose every purchase, hiding accounts or lying about big purchases can be toxic to the relationship and can lead to bigger emotional issues down the line, such as guilt by the person keeping the secrets. The question of

trust arises when the partner who was deceived inevitably finds out.

## **7. Give each other some breathing room**

Conferring with your spouse about all of your purchases can feel very restricting – especially when you find yourself having to defend a purchase that your partner doesn't endorse. That is why various experts suggest having separate budgets for each spouse to spend on discretionary items of their choosing.

Perry Higgins says, "I recommend a line item on the family's budget title "fun money". These are the funds that can be used any way they choose and partners don't need to report back to one another each month as to what they used those funds for."

Bell uses a variation of this strategy in his family – he and his wife have separate clothing budgets that they can spend however they want. "There is a freedom there," he says, as long as each spouse remembers that they are accountable for staying within their budget.

## **8. Come up with a system – like CPUs**

When it comes to spending, it is important for couples to have some ground rules in place to determine, for instance, what purchases need to be discussed ahead of time or what the reasonable spending limit is on clothing, kid's toys, food or other household items.

In my family, we use CPUs, which stands for “cost per use.” It is based on whether the amount of use an item will get justifies its cost (this strategy has gotten thumbs up from every financial advisor I have talked to).

CPUs work best with bigger ticket items. For example, it would be tough to justify the CPU on a \$500 pair of shoes that will be worn five times — since it basically means it would cost \$100 each time they were worn.

A \$500 briefcase would be easier to justify since it would be used every day, coming out to pennies on the dollar for each use. We don’t use CPUs as an exact science but it has allowed us to create a baseline for spending that we can both reasonably follow. While this may not work for everyone, it is important for spouses to have some sort of mutually agreed upon system to ensure they are both on the same page when it comes to spending.

## **9. Remember the golden rule**

Treat your spouse, as you would want him or her to treat you. This may seem simple and obvious but it is something that a lot of couples forget to do, especially the longer they are married.

Experts say one of the biggest problems couples face when it comes to money is how they argue about it. Everyone argues, Bell says but “It’s much more important how you have a financial disagreement.” He adds, it is okay to complain about something that your partner is doing but it is not okay to use words that are

contemptuous or to use negative labels such as “irresponsible” to describe their behaviour.

## **10. Call for reinforcements**

If fights about money have hijacked your marriage and you are coming close to pulling the plug, consider enlisting the help of a third party who can help you get back on track.

For some couples, this might be a financial planner (consider one that charges by the hour so you don’t have to make a long-term financial commitment) or if you are religious, enlist the help of an Islamic community service. You could also make an appointment with a couple’s therapist. There is a burgeoning field called “financial therapy” that is dedicated specifically to helping couples navigate financial turmoil.

## **Biggest Money Mistakes You Can Make in a Marriage<sup>25</sup>**

The following is another article that I'd like to share with regards to finances, but particularly in relation to the big mistakes that one can make when it comes to managing money within a marriage. The piece is from CNBC online’s “Love and Money” section. Please take a look!

Many North Americans have magical thinking when it comes to the intersection of their hearts and wallets. Unhealthy attitudes about love and money are fuelled

at an early age. Young children are told classic fairy tales, such as Cinderella and Sleeping Beauty. The moral of these stories is that a woman should wait to be emotionally and financially rescued by her prince and to be an attractive man, you need to be "filthy rich". In reality, partners need to work together to make, manage and invest their money.

Sounds simple but it's complicated.

Money represents more than dollars and cents and frequently is used to express feelings in relationships. It can be given to express love, power, and respect or withheld to punish, control or humiliate. It is no wonder adults fall into money traps when it comes to love.

The first step, in successfully navigating the tricky land of couples and money, is to be aware of the common mistakes many romantic partners make.

Here are the top five blunders:

### **1. Believing that "love conquers all"**

While it sounds romantic, the truth is that it takes a lot more than loving someone to successfully manage money as a couple. It takes hard work and a commitment by both partners to talk openly about their different viewpoints on spending, saving and investing.

Couples who enjoy a peaceful relationship with money often have shared values, an appreciation for their

partner's diverse viewpoint and the ability to find common ground, even when it's difficult. While loving your partner helps, it is not a guarantee that you will live happily ever after financially.

## **2. Practicing money silence**

Money silence occurs when couples fail to talk openly about money. This code of silence is passed down from generation to generation and leads to miscommunication, misunderstandings and hurt feelings. It is the reason many marriages end in divorce and why so many children become financially unprepared adults. Breaking the money silence may not be easy but it truly is a gift to yourself and the next generation.

## **3. Avoiding financial conflict**

In a survey done by CESI Debt Solutions, 80 percent of spouses admitted to hiding some financial purchases from their partners. The primary motivator: avoiding a fight and wishing that the problem would go away. However, when you don't openly discuss money to prevent a fight, you miss an opportunity to understand your partner's perspective and resolve a problem.

Ultimately, the same problem comes up again and again. The truth is, engaging in a financial conflict from time to time is healthy and increases intimacy in a marriage. So the next time you have the urge to avoid a



financial disagreement, take a deep breath and think again.

#### **4. Waiting to be financially rescued**

Putting your financial future in the hands of your partner may sound nice but it is a risky proposition. If your loved one gets ill, suddenly dies or decides to leave you, the safety blanket of being taken care of is abruptly ripped out from under your feet.

#### **5. Meeting with your financial advisor alone**

Life is busy and couples often use the divide-and-conquer strategy for getting tasks done. Delegating daily duties, such as grocery shopping and taking out the trash, is one thing but entrusting one partner to meet with your financial advisor to invest your money is another. Schedule joint appointments, and invest the time in this important aspect of your relationship.

Working with your advisor together gives you a place to talk about money, resolve financial differences and make decisions about your future as a team. It also ensures that if something happens to one of you, the other person is not left in the dark. Besides, it is one of the best ways to avoid big money mistakes and keep love and money in their proper places.

## **Chapter Fifteen: Effects of Porn on Your Brain, Your Marriage and Your Sex Life<sup>26</sup>**

### **Gloves are off. Let's talk!**

Please forgive me brothers and sisters but I receive too many complaints about this issue. So, my gloves are off for this one and here it is...

Pornography. It is an absolute plague. To address it, let's turn to the following discussion on this issue from the website, To Love, Honor, and Vacuum. It's a very useful overview of how this plague affects your love life and your marriage. It's one of the most urgent, emergency issues of our community and it deserves your undivided attention. For complete sources to the points made, please consult the webpage sourced in the References section.

Pornography is ravaging marriages. In our culture, porn is treated as if it is harmless, but it's not. Porn will wreck the arousal process in your brain and end up wrecking your sex life in marriage. The effects of porn are devastating.

I receive complaints from women who are desperate to fix their marriages but they don't know what to do. They married men who never seem to want sex, or their husbands are never satisfied, or their husbands call them boring or unattractive. And the root of many of these problems is porn.

Here is the really devastating part: Because so much of what porn does to you happens chemically in the brain, the use of porn does not have to be going on NOW to have these effects. A boy who grew up on porn in his teens and then managed to stop watching it in his twenties (with occasional relapses) will still suffer from many of these effects.

The good news: There is healing! You can rebuild those chemical pathways to arousal. But first, we have to understand 10 ways that porn affects the brain, and thus wrecks many couples' sex lives.

The Top Effects of Porn on Your Sex Life:

*And remember—women use porn as well. While some of these apply just to men, many of them apply to both genders.*

### **1. Porn Means You Can't Get Aroused by "Just" Your Spouse**

Do you remember reading about Pavlov and his dog in psychology? Pavlov would give the dog a nice juicy steak but right before he did he would ring a bell. He conditioned the dog to associate ringing the bell with getting great food. Eventually, Pavlov took the food away but kept ringing the bell. The dog kept salivating at the bell, even though there was no steak because it associated the bell with the food.

The same thing happens when we see porn. Porn stimulates the arousal centers in the brain. When it is accompanied by orgasm (sexual release through masturbation), then a chemical reaction happens and hormones are released. In effect, our brains start to associate arousal with an image, an idea, or a video, rather than a person.

When you don't watch porn and save yourself until marriage, then all of those chemicals and hormones are released for the first time when you are with your spouse and it causes you to bond intensely (and sexually) to your spouse. But when you spend a ton of time teaching your brain to associate arousal and release with pornography, your brain can't associate arousal and release with a person anymore. Either you have to fantasize about the porn and get those images there or you have to watch porn first. Often people can "complete the act" but it is not as intense for them as porn is. You have rewired your brain, and now you are salivating at the wrong thing.

## **2. Porn Wrecks Your Libido**

It is only natural, then, that many people who have used porn in the past or who use porn in the present, have virtually no libido when it comes to making love to their spouse. The spouse is not what turns them on and so the natural drive that we have for sex is transferred somewhere else. I get so many emails from young women in their twenties who say, "My husband and I

were both virgins when we married and I thought he would want sex all the time. But after our honeymoon, sex went to maybe twice a month and that's only if I pressured him. He says he just isn't interested." With so many men growing up on porn, this is to be expected.

### **3. Porn Makes You Sexually Lazy**

In porn, everyone is turned on all the time. You don't have to make any effort to arouse someone; it is automatic. There is no foreplay in porn. And so if your spouse isn't aroused you start to think that it is somehow their fault. There is no expectation that we will have to "woo" someone or be affectionate and help jumpstart that arousal process. It is almost as if we approach sex as two different beings and we are just using each other, rather than thinking of each other. And thus we never learn how to please the other or become a good lover because we are always thinking that the other is somehow "frigid." Sex is about getting my needs met; it isn't about meeting someone else's needs or experiencing something wonderful together.

### **4. Porn Turns "Making Love" into a Foreign Concept**

Those arousal centers and pleasure centers in our brain are supposed to associate sex with physical pleasure and a real sense of intimacy. But the intimacy doesn't happen with porn and so the pleasure is all that registers. Thus, sex becomes about the body and not about intimacy. In fact, the idea of being intimate isn't

even sexy anymore; anonymous is what's sexy. We may call "having sex" and "making love" the same thing but in reality, they aren't necessarily the same thing.

Someone who has used porn extensively often has a difficult time experiencing any intimacy during sex because those arousal and pleasure centers zero in only on the body.

God made sex to actually unite us and draw us together; He even gave us a bonding hormone that is released at orgasm so that we can feel closer. But if that hormone is released when no one is present, it stops having its effects. Sex no longer bonds you together.

## **5. Porn Makes Regular Intercourse Seem Boring**

An alcoholic drinks alcohol for the "buzz." But after a while, your body begins to tolerate it. To get the same buzz, you need more alcohol. And so the alcoholic begins to drink harder liquor or drink larger quantities.

The same thing happens with porn. Because porn teaches us that sex is all about the body and not about intimacy, then the only way to get a greater "high" or that same buzz is to watch pornographic videos that are more and more graphic and disturbing in nature. I think most of us would be horrified if we saw what most porn today really is. It is not just pictures of naked women like there used to be in Playboy; most is very violent, extremely degrading and very ugly.

“Regular” intercourse is actually not depicted that often in porn and so quite frequently the person who watches porn starts to get a warped view of what sex really is. And often they start to want stranger and weirder things.

Don’t get me wrong, I am not against spicing things up in the bedroom and I do think sexual exploration can be fun for couples! But when we want “more” because we have programmed ourselves to think “the weirder the sexier,” there is a problem.

## **6. Porn makes it Hard to Be Tender When You Have Sex**

It is no wonder, then, that people who use porn often have a hard time being tender when they have sex. Sex tends to be impersonal, rushed and “forced.” I am absolutely not saying that all porn users rape their wives but porn itself is often violent. There is no foreplay. There is no waiting to arouse someone. It is just taking what you want.

Being tender means to express love and affection. Because these things aren’t paired with sex in the porn user’s brain, tenderness and sex no longer go together.

## **7. Porn Trains You to Have Immediate Gratification and Have a Difficult Time Lasting Long**

With porn, when you are aroused you reach orgasm very quickly because porn users tend to masturbate at

the same time. Thus, orgasm tends to be very fast. The porn user has not trained his body to draw out sex so that his spouse can get pleasure; his body is programmed to reach orgasm quickly. Many porn users, then, suffer from premature ejaculation.

Some porn users go to the other extreme when they start suffering from erectile dysfunction. They have a difficult time remaining “hard” enough during sex because the stimulation isn’t enough. In their case, orgasm can take an eternity, if it is possible at all.

### **8. Porn Gives You a Warped View of what Attractive Is**

Sex is supposed to bond you physically, emotionally and spiritually with your spouse. But if porn has made the chemical pathways in your brain go haywire, then sex becomes only about the body. And porn shows you that only certain body types are attractive. It is not about the whole person; it is just a certain type of person.

If a woman gains even ten pounds, then, she is no longer attractive and the porn user has an honest to goodness difficult time getting aroused because he associates only a certain body type with arousal.

### **9. Porn Makes Sex Seem Like Too Much Work**

All of this makes sex with your spouse too much work. You are not aroused; you find your spouse is not attractive; sex is blah and requires you to make an



effort for your spouse, while you are used to immediate gratification.

Thus, many people who use porn retreat into a life of masturbation. Even if the porn use stops, they often find it easier to “relieve” themselves in the shower than to have to work at sex.

### **10. Porn Causes Selfishness**

All of this causes a spiral of selfishness where the person ignores his spouse’s needs and is focused only on getting what he wants and getting it instantly. Often this manifests itself in other areas of the relationship as well, where the spouse becomes annoyed if they have to wait for something or if they don’t get what they want. Porn has sold them the message: you deserve pleasure when you want it. You shouldn’t have to work to get what you want. Your needs are paramount.

### **11. Impact on Wives:**

For many women, discovering that their husbands have been viewing pornography is similar to uncovering an extramarital affair. As a result, they experience a variety of emotions: anger, hurt, sadness, betrayals and rejection. They believe their husbands would rather be with the women they view in pornography rather than their wives. Often they feel that they have been replaced by a computer image. The woman on the computer screen is “the other woman.” Because of this,

many women are devastated when they discover their husbands have been looking at porn.

## **12. Impact on Husbands:**

Studies have shown that men crave respect from their wives more than love. Pornography robs men of this basic need. Pornography use almost always leads women to lose respect for their husbands. They also begin to view their husbands as poor role models for their children. This adds to the lack of respect. This can be very painful for women because it inhibits their ability to love, honour and respect their husbands. Men were created to be the leaders, providers, and protectors of their wives and families. Pornography prevents men from being able to fulfill these roles because it leads a man to isolate himself and neglect his wife and children. This deepens the wound in the marriage.

It is no wonder that it shows up in other areas of your relationship.

People who think that porn is harmless and simply helps people “get in the mood” or “relieves frustration” are only fooling themselves. The chemical processes in our brains are really complicated, and when you start messing with them, it is difficult to develop a healthy sex life and maintain a healthy relationship.

## **How To Overcome A Porn Addiction: Advice From Ten Influential Sex experts<sup>27</sup>:**

I'd like to explore the solutions to this problem a bit more, so I've included a highly detailed discussion and explication of the pornography problem from Reboot Blueprint, an influential pornography therapy site. It is a large compilation of solutions and advice from men who are acquainted with this problem. Please give it a read, as it has lots of relevant advice for our context.

Some influential sexual health writers were asked this simple question:

***"What are three important factors for successfully recovering from porn addiction?"***

### **Gary Wilson from YourBrainOnPorn.com:**

Guys who have recovered have come up with lots of wise advice over the past 5 years. Here are three of my favourite pieces of advice guys have shared:

***1. "Stop medicating yourself with porn every time you feel pain and discomfort."***

Stress, depression, frustration, boredom, injuries, physical pain, anxiety, and embarrassment are all part of life.

All these bad feelings are temporary. They will all pass. If we keep taking refuge in porn and running away from

pain and discomfort, then we will never be able to grow as individuals and become real men.

If you don't break out of this cycle, what are you going to do when things get tough in life? Hide in your room? Become depressed? What are you going to do when you realize that hitting on girls brings up a lot of anxiety and nervousness? Run away? Make excuses? What are you going to do when you are stuck in a traffic jam for two hours and you are hungry? Complain? Hit the horn endlessly? What are you going to do when you realize that losing weight isn't as easy as you thought it would be? Give up? Binge on junk food? *Stop using porn as a pain reliever. "Face reality, don't run from it."*

***2. "You will only be able to go long periods of time without porn when watching porn is no longer an option in your life."***

I call it the "Porn is NOT an Option" mindset. *The men that have this mindset live as if porn didn't exist.* They completely forget about porn. They do not spend their day fighting urges. They are not "trying hard." Urges are dismissed almost instantly. *You have to be OK with the idea that you will never watch porn ever again in your life.* If this idea gives you anxiety or makes you cringe, then you don't have the "Porn is NOT an Option" mindset yet. If you are having urges on day 17 and you are slightly considering watching porn, then that means that in your mind you haven't truly made the decision to quit. If you know that you are going to be home

alone this weekend and you are worried about a relapse, then that means you are not ready yet.

### **3. “*Stop focusing on NOT watching porn.*”**

Guess what? If you are thinking about not watching porn, you are thinking about porn. As long as porn is on your mind, you will have a lot of trouble letting it go. The correct approach is to just *forget about it*. Get clear in your mind that watching porn is not a part of your life anymore. It is a thing of the past. Stop obsessing about what day you are on, journaling about your misery and hanging out too much on recovery forums. Focus your mind on what matters such as your family, your dreams, your health and your career. When urges arise, watch them mindfully. Observe them. Do not react. Do not suppress them. Do not push them away. Just kindly smile and focus your mind on one of a list of activities that you have chosen in advance for moments like this (get your heart rate pumping with push-ups, call a friend, take a walk, meditate, fix a healthy snack, take a cold shower, whatever). Better yet, PRAY.

**Gregor Schmidinger from SexGodProject.com:**

**I believe that the most important thing is to become aware of your porn consumption.**

When do you watch porn? Where do you watch porn? How do you watch porn? And most importantly why do you watch porn? Becoming aware of the answers to

these questions will be your most powerful tool in changing your habits, which is necessary to quit porn.

**You need to cultivate a mindset of allowing yourself to fail.**

Nobody learned to ride a bike right away. We try and fall but it is important not to beat yourself up over it or even quit rebooting. Dust yourself off, get back on the bike and try it again. Never despair of Allaah's mercy, as He does not just forgive sins if you repent, but indeed, turns a bad deed into a good deed. Use training wheels at the beginning. You will get better over time and one day you will just ride the bike without thinking about it anymore.

**Have clear and realistic goals.**

If you are not sure what is realistic, use others experiences and adapt your goals along the way. Set milestones and work your way from milestone to milestone. Instead of being too ambitious, as I might have been at the beginning, set smaller goals and milestones and make sure to step back from time to time and look at what you have accomplished. Stepping back is as important as going after your milestones and goals.

**Jonathan Doyle from StopUsingPornography.com:**

**Go To the Source**

Most of the time pornography is a symptom of something that goes much deeper and usually has a much longer history. Over many years after speaking to thousands of men, I have learned that these men many times carry a past of trauma or pain and long ago pornography became their default source for comfort. Trying to white-knuckle it out by willpower alone usually creates further feelings of guilt and shame and so the cycle continues. Men struggling with addiction need to access the help of qualified clinical psychologists or counsellors who can commence this process of uncovering the deeper wounds that drive addiction. It is a brave journey to commence but the payoffs are huge.

### **Get Around Good Men**

The people who developed the original 12 steps program brought something powerful to the world. One of the things they knew is that we rarely accomplish anything extraordinary without the help of good people around us. Men are usually terrible at reaching out to other men and forming supportive groups and networks. It is absolutely crucial to join or start a group of men who can support you on the journey of recovery. These need to be men who you deeply trust and with whom you can share anything. You need a safe place with solid brothers where you can speak about a third person to him, open up the pain and confusion and discover he's not alone. That last sentence is important. Addiction convinces the addict that they are

the most shameful, awful person on the face of the planet. It creates a terrible cycle of isolation. Once you start to travel with other men on the journey of honesty and discovery, you will discover that you may be a broken human but you are definitely not alone.

### **Build a New Foundation**

A lot of the time men dealing with pornography addiction have lives that are out of control across the board. This will often show up in issues like lack of proper diet, sleep, and exercise and, importantly, the ability to have fun. Usually, the shame and pain are so strong that addicts hate themselves and treat themselves worse than they would treat a stray dog. A key step is to slowly rebuild balance in lifestyle areas such as overall health. It is also really important to rediscover how to have fun. Recovering addicts need to rediscover what brought them joy in life long ago and then go and do a load of that. It might be golf, fly-fishing, surfing or painting but whatever it is, it must become non-negotiable. Men, in general, find it really hard to have fun, as they get older. They think it might be selfish or immature. Until they learn to treat themselves as they would a beloved child, they will stay trapped.

**Andrew from LoveAndFreedomProject.com:**

**Far and away the most important factor is *having a supportive community*.**



Kicking any addiction is hard but the research shows us again and again that people who are backed by a supportive community do better. So, please change your environment and company to righteous ones.

**The second most important factor would be *physical health*.**

I really can't overstate how important it is to get your physical body restored to natural working order. By this I mean sleeping enough, eating higher quality, cleaner food (no processed foods, no sugar, moderate to little caffeine) and working out regularly. The constant stress in the modern world is literally toxic. Most of us are under-slept and over-stressed and eating poorly and then we wonder why we have bad coping habits like porn. The good news is any improvements you make to your physical health pays dividends in terms of increased willpower and lowered stress and this makes it easier to continue improving your life. I recommend people start with green tea and pray— two easy, inexpensive solutions almost anyone can take. They both have big benefits relative to their costs.

**Third and finally: *Purpose*.**

You need to have a really good reason for doing this. Deprogramming this brain that has been so deeply ingrained, often over a decade or more is going to be really tough but it is doable if it is in service of a larger goal. Even if it is something as abstract as 'freedom', the

desire to be unencumbered by any personal compulsion, will work. I know a lot of husbands are doing this for their wives, even when such a person has not even shown up in their lives yet. Or they are doing it to reclaim their innate masculinity. So they don't have to hide this compulsive behaviour from their kids. There are probably as many good reasons as there are people.

**Matt Cook from SexResearchLabs.org:**

***Three important factors for successfully recovering from porn addiction***

Quitting porn seems to be a very easy, easy thing until you try it and more specifically until the going gets tough, which it will eventually.

I will give you just one thing to do, which will make a huge difference. Focus on this one thing and your chances of success are almost guaranteed.

**Let me explain.**

The problem with getting rid of an addiction is that you can't leave it unresolved and hope that it will go away. We need to do something. And we need to think of something else, in advance, before the moment gets hot and we can't think clearly because our addicted brain is controlling us.

The most important factor in recovery is determining what to do in advance when the moment arrives. What to do instead of reaching out for porn?

This is called finding replacement behaviours.

There is a reason you use porn, beyond just getting off. Porn use can eliminate boredom. Make loneliness feel better, can help you get to sleep and avoid nasty confrontations with your wife about sex.

I call these “jobs” that porn does for you in your life.

So you write down the jobs that porn does in your life. And determine replacement behaviour. For example, let’s say you use porn to lessen loneliness when you are by yourself. So you write down, in advance, in a few quiet minutes, “If I’m home by myself I will read a book/take a walk/go to Starbucks.” You pick one of these. And this is your replacement behaviour.

You will find that figuring these out in an “if...then” format and then behaving accordingly makes kicking porn and recovery much easier.

**George N. Collins, M.A. from**  
**CompulsionSolutions.com:**

### **You Are Not Your Mind**

It was no accident that Salman could not stop watching porn. There were definite reasons. One of them was Salman’s mind was telling him a story about watching

porn and Salman was listening. “Of course he was listening!” You might respond. “How can you not listen to your mind?” I’m here to tell you that you are not your mind or your thoughts or your story. If you don’t believe me, read on.

### **You Are Not Your Story**

One reason you have an addiction could be that as a child you began to believe a story about yourself. But, unlike other stories you took in, such as *Star Trek* or *Harry Potter*, you believed that your story was true. Why? Because your story served a very important purpose: It made you feel better; at least temporarily. As a child, believing your story may have been a way of coping with situations or emotions that you felt were out of your control. As an adult, you also have situations and feelings that cause you stress or distress. You want to feel better. So you go back to your story. And you might feel better watching porn and having an orgasm but it does not last. You then may feel shame and loneliness. Why? Because the story is not true; you don’t end up feeling better but you believe the story is true because something is telling you it is true; it is your mind. But the real truth is...

### **You Are Not Your Mind**

When your mind sends you a thought such as, “I’m hungry. Let’s get a slice of pizza,” you believe that it is true. And in that case, it probably is true. But your mind

also sends you thoughts that are not true, such as: “Let’s take a break and watch some porn. We’ll feel better.” Again, there could be that exciting hit from watching porn and then, hours later, that feeling of deflation, shame, isolation and possibly remorse may step in. Your mind keeps telling you to do it and you believe your mind and your story. But you can stop believing everything your mind tells you. How? It’s not easy, and...

### **You Always Have a Choice**

*“What are three important factors for successfully recovering from porn addiction?”* 1. Commit to a process of self-awareness and rigorous honesty concerning your thoughts and behaviour. 2. I can’t put enough emphasis on righteous company and environment. 3. Develop empathy towards your intimate partner and others you have harmed with your porn use.

### **Chris Haven from QuitPornGetGirls.com:**

#### **1) Desire:**

Simply put, the man who wants to leave pornography behind badly enough and is willing to do whatever it takes to get there will be successful in overcoming his addiction. For most men, it takes a traumatic or terrible event to jolt them back to the reality of the damage porn causes in their lives. Develop an unquenchable

desire to conquer your addiction. It must take priority over every other desire you have-because every other desire you have in life will eventually be sabotaged by your addiction.

## **2) Willingness to Fail:**

You will fail, again and again... and yet again. And you must rise up yet again with the same bold determination to fix this part of your life.

[I'd like to insert an Islamic story here to help illustrate the point for our Muslim context]

A man came to a scholar and told him, "I have an illness, and you have the cure."

The scholar asked him, "What is your illness?"

He replied, "Every time I want to repent, I go back to the same sins."

The scholar told him, "I will give you five remedies; maybe one of them will work: If you want to commit a sin, do it in a kingdom other than Allaah's, eat from other's provisions, in a place where He cannot see you, decline the Angel of Death's visit when he comes to take your soul, or refuse to go to the Angels of the Hellfire when they take."

He said, "I know that there's no way except to go back and repent to Allaah."

### **3) Learn to love yourself as a man:**

Probably the greatest gift you can give yourself when recovering from addiction is to love yourself. You have to drop your ego to truly quit porn and go through the arduous recovery process. Learn to be radically honest about all your desires — especially, the deepest, darkest ones related to your addiction. Vulnerability is the first step towards loving yourself as a man and also the toughest practice for most of us. Vulnerability is also the paved road that leads to the root of your addiction.

**Mark Queppet from SacredSexualityProject.com:**

#### **1. Protect yourself from your gremlin**

Your gremlin is that little voice in your head that tries to convince you to do things that deep down you know are not good for you. The key is not letting this voice have an equal say in your actions. Gremlins can have incredibly persuasive arguments that make relapsing and watching porn seem like a really good idea in the heat of the moment. The trick is to get extremely clear on what you TRULY believe so that when a gremlin thought pops up, you can identify it as that rogue part of you that shouldn't be listened to. In order to do this, make a list of all the ways in which porn is holding you back from the life that you want and then make a list of all the ways porn plays into your ideal lifestyle. When you have thoughts that violate this list, then you know

that it is just your gremlin and you shouldn't follow what it says.

## **2. Get comfortable with discomfort**

Porn is escape behaviour. It lets you run away from whatever you are feeling – horniness, boredom, anxiety, loneliness, stress, etc. It lets you trade discomfort for momentary pleasure. The problem is that if you are always running away from these feelings instead of learning how to deal with them and the underlying issues, then you create a cycle of dependence. The key is learning how to face the things that are uncomfortable to us. Everything worth getting is going to call for us to step outside of our comfort zone and breaking free from porn is no different.

Now that we've had a good overview of this pertinent issue, let's turn to Sound Vision for a more Islamic look at this problem. Here is another useful guide to help people tackle the problem of pornography.

### **12-Step Guide to Fight Pornography Addiction: An Islamic Perspective<sup>28</sup>**

**Step One-Admit that you can't give up:** Admit that you are unable to get a grip on your consumption of pornography. It is uncontrollable. Every time you turn on the internet, go to the video store, turn on the television, you cannot say NO to yourself. You cannot stop surfing porn sites or stop watching. You are no longer in control of your life.



**Step Two-Admit only God can get you out of this:** You know, after trying to use so many different ways to control your addiction and subsequently failing, only Allaah can help you out of this. You may have known it before but you are convinced of it now without a shadow of a doubt.

**Step Three-Your life and death are all in Allaah's control:** You have decided to put your complete trust in Allaah, who is in control of all aspects of your life and your death. You have chosen to seek His Help first and foremost.

**Step Four-You have completed a self-analysis:** You have done an honest, sincere but often painful self-evaluation of your good points and bad points, analyzed your addiction and tried to understand how you reached this point.

**Step Five-Made a specific repentance to Allaah:** You have admitted to Allaah, to yourself and to another trusted Muslim (if possible) exactly where you went wrong. You did not make a general request for repentance. You specifically listed your mistakes and in particular, your addiction to pornography.

**Step Six-You were open and ready to receive Allaah's help to change:** You know that your Tawbah (sincere repentance to God) must be followed by action. You are ready to do what is necessary to change, no matter how

difficult or painful. It means not watching television for the news or surfing the Internet alone.

**Step Seven- You have asked for the removal of faults:**

You have asked Allaah, with sincerity, humility, and regret, to help you never repeat this action (i.e. looking at pornography) again and to help you avoid repeating sins committed in the past.

**Step Eight-You have decided to seek others'**

**forgiveness:** You have made a list of everyone you have hurt through your addiction, whether it is your spouse, children or parents and made the intention to approach them seeking forgiveness. You must not, however, disclose your addiction since whatever Allaah has kept hidden must remain hidden. You just seek forgiveness for any possible act of harm and hurt. Allaah does not like a sin to be advertised.

**Step Nine-Seek forgiveness of God:** Seek the forgiveness and protection of Allaah. Give sadaqah (charity) as well as kaffarah if possible.

**Step Ten-You have completed nightly self-evaluations:**

You continuously, every night, have done an honest self-evaluation of your behaviour and were ready to admit your mistakes and thank Allaah for the good you did that day.

**Step Eleven-You have prayed for greater God-**

**consciousness:** You prayed and continued to pray five times a day, seeking closeness to Allaah and a

consciousness of Him (Taqwa) wherever you are. You increase your reliance on Him to help you with this addiction to pornography and with all other matters in your life.

**Step Twelve-You preached and practiced:** You have not just "moved on" after Allaah blessed you to get out of this addiction. You helped others you knew with this problem with regular contact and sincere advice. By the grace of Allaah, helping others helped you maintain control over your addiction and you helped another person get out of this destruction and misery.

## **Chapter Sixteen: The In-laws Syndrome<sup>29</sup>**

I am sure it will come as no surprise to you, brothers and sisters, that one of the aspects of my job is to address issues that come to my attention and the issue of in-laws relations is one of the most common complaints I get, no matter where I go in the world. Here is a good discussion of this very important issue from Family Education, a very useful resource for all family-related issues. It provides a very good guide and overview for our topic here.

### **Basic Rules for Dealing with In-Laws:**

Your in-laws are a crucial part of your spouse's life. This makes them a crucial part of your life as well. No one ever said it was easy to balance your needs with the needs of others -- especially the needs of an entirely new family. But creating family harmony is possible -- and it is worth very much the effort.

You realize it won't be easy to build bridges and rebuild some that have been burnt but you also realize that it is a valuable way to spend your time. The return you get on your investment will last the rest of your married life. Here are some ideas to get you started.

#### **1. Work with your spouse.**

This is the key rule, numero uno, the whole enchilada. As my wonderful spouse reminded me last night, dealing effectively with in-laws all starts with first

working conflicts through with your spouse. Remember, you are in this together. Most men place their own families over their wives; they forget their obligation to their spouse is very important. And BOTH need to work together to respect and honor one another.

Never put your spouse in a situation where he or she has to choose between you and a relative. If you do so, you are putting your spouse in a nearly impossible bind. Instead, try to understand the bond your spouse has with his or her grandparents, parents, and siblings. If possible, try to support that relationship. Even if your spouse has parents from hell, they are his or her parents.

## **2. Set boundaries and limits.**

No candy before mealtime for the kids? No loans for in-laws? With your spouse, decide what is important and what is not. For example, we let our kids eat anything they want anytime. Want ice cream ten minutes before dinner? Fine by me...as long as you eat a reasonable dinner. But we are really, really picky about school work. I don't think it has dawned on my kids yet that there is a grade below "A." Work as a team and set your family values. Then communicate your values to all your in-laws. Speaking of boundaries, don't make promises that you can't keep. Remember Neville Chamberlain, Hitler, and Poland? In an attempt to achieve "peace in our time," British politico Neville Chamberlain gave Poland to Hitler as part of the British

appeasement policy. Remember how well that worked? Hitler just kept right on seizing chunks of Europe. Placating people to keep the peace rarely solves the problem especially if your in-laws are not cooperating.

### **3. Enforce the boundaries and limits.**

Without being as inflexible as a teenager, stick to your guns. For example, if you don't want company to drop-in, tell your in-laws that you would prefer that they call before they show up at your doorstep.

### **4. Communicate directly.**

Whenever possible, avoid communicating through a third party. Don't ask your spouse to talk to his sister about something she did that hurt your feelings. Talk to your sister-in-law directly.

If something bothers you, address it as soon as possible. Sometimes it is a genuine problem; other times, it might be a misunderstanding. Tori married into a family whose members had been born in Germany. Every time a family member went into the kitchen, he or she shut the door -- often leaving Tori out. For years, she stewed over the situation. Finally, she got up the courage to ask her mother-in-law why she closed the kitchen door. "Why, to keep in the heat," she answered. "We always did that in Germany." Closing the kitchen door had nothing to do with Tori, a cultural misunderstanding had caused years of distress for her, which neither she nor her in-laws realized.

## **5. Know yourself.**

Shakespeare said it a zillion years ago and the advice still holds today: Don't try to remake yourself into the person your in-laws want. If they are looking for little Susie Homemaker and you are a high-powered corporate attorney, you are under no obligation on your day off to bake Swedish rye bread and churn your own butter. Get a manicure and call for some take-out instead.

## **6. Get with the program.**

Not every father-in-law lives to snake out your kitchen sink; not every mother-in-law dreams of baking cookies with her grandchildren. Put away the stereotypes and adjust your thinking to the reality of the situation. Don't expect what people can't deliver.

## **7. Learn to cool off.**

While we are at it, play nice. Spare your in-laws the insults and character attacks. For example, Asif's father-in-law once called his son a knee-jerk liberal. "I had it on the tip of my tongue to call him a "bloody fascist," Asif said, "Fortunately, I bit my tongue-even though he really is a fascist."

## **8. Be mature.**

Your parents have to love you; it is in the contract. But your in-laws don't. Accept the fact that your in-laws

aren't your parents and won't follow the same rules. Try to think "different" -- not "better" or "worse." To make this work, give in on small points and negotiate the key issues.

Learn to see the situation from your in-law's point of view. And even if you don't agree, act like a big person

### **9. Be kind.**

Even if you have to grit your teeth, try to say something nice, if you really can't say anything nice, just smile.

### **10. Keep your sense of humour.**

A very dear sister tells this story: "When I was pregnant with my first child, my father-in-law bought me a special gift: My very own funeral plot. 'Why a funeral plot?' I asked her. 'Well,' she replied, 'you might not make it through the birth and I thought you should be prepared.' I probably would have slugged the man upside his head; my friend, in contrast, laughed and thanked him for his gift.

P.S. She and all her children are fine.

**I'd like to now turn to a more practical guide when it comes to the good and bad ideas when dealing with in-laws. This following section is quoted from a very useful summary on this subject from *Reader's Digest*.**

**The Dos and Don'ts when Dealing With Your In-Laws<sup>30</sup>**



So you just got married and now you have got a whole second family. Here is how to survive the transition and thrive long-term, courtesy of psychotherapist Tina B. Tessina:

**DO** understand how your spouse relates to his or her parents.

**DON'T** assume that family relationship will resemble the one in your family.

**DO** take the time to get to know your in-laws—if you are separated by distance, write or e-mail each other.

**DON'T** take offense easily—you may just not understand the family dynamic.

**DO** check with your partner about family customs. Will his mother expect a hostess gift? Or a thank-you note? What do they like to eat? What's their sense of humour like? Can you talk about politics or religion in front of them?

**DON'T** criticize your partner's family. Rather, ask for explanations of things you don't understand.

**DO** be polite and friendly—use your most charming ways around your in-laws.

**DON'T** assume they understand how you feel—they may not have a clue. Along those lines, don't take their comments and reactions personally. You may not understand them as they were meant to be understood.

**DO** think about what will work best for you and your partner before you try to please your partner's family.

**DON'T** ignore your partner while you are with your family. You can talk to your sister but make sure you check in with each other frequently.

**DO** consider doing something that has a time limit and is easier. If you go to dinner in a restaurant, everyone might be a bit better behaved.

**DON'T** hesitate to ask your spouse how it went when it is over. A "debriefing" can help both of you.

## **Chapter Seventeen: Happily Ever After Factor<sup>31</sup>**

For this final chapter, I would like to leave you with a practical and usable game plan to be happy in this life and happier in the Hereafter; in-sha-Allaah, Aameen. I'd like to use the following article from *The Huffington Post* weddings section to illustrate this aspect of the guide. It's a very good compilation of advice when it comes to building a successful and sustainable marriage within an Islamic context.

It is often said that marriage is a lot of work, so it is refreshing to hear from couples who not only figured out how to make their love last but are having an awesome time doing it.

A question was posted: Why are you still married? The replies, from real-life couples who are just as in love now as when they said "I do," give a glimpse into the makings of a lasting marriage.

Below are thirteen secrets of happily married couples:

### **1. They trust each other.**

"We don't judge each other. We trust each other. We don't have one of those wild tempestuous marriages. No one will ever write a book about us and there will never be a Lifetime movie based on our relationship.

But I am in exactly the kind of relationship I have always wanted."

**2. They take the good with the bad and become stronger for it.**

"We are coming up on 19 years next week. I am still married because I totally respect him for how he has held my hand through the bad times. The good times were good but the bad times were ten times worse. His friendship and commitment never wavered."

**3. They respect each other.**

"Married for 39 years... Why? in my stomach when I hear his car drive into the driveway. He treats me with respect and he's a lot of fun on a road trip."

**4. They're honest with each other.**

"11 years together, ... he provides me support when I need it and tells me when to 'suck it up, princess'. He deals with all of my family drama and brings me ice cream ... he gives the best hugs and is amazing in bed."

**5. They find joy in the little things.**

"He's the person I most want to hang out with whether it's going out to eat or just sitting together watching TV. And he feels the same way about me. It's great. No matter what life throws at us (and it's thrown a lot so far!), we always know we will be there for each other."

## **6. They embrace each other's differences.**

"I love being married. My wife and I are opposites. I am impulsive; she is detailed. I am aggressive; she is reserved. Together we are like superheroes, winning and conquering all!"

## **7. Sure, they argue, but they always fight fair.**

"My husband never has unkind words for me, even when he's upset. It means the world to me that we can 'argue' and still say 'I love you.'"

## **8. They have fun, even when doing absolutely nothing at all.**

"The most important thing starting out was that we loved being with each other. We made each other laugh. We could do something or nothing and have a great time because we were together. We just fit."

## **9. They cheer each other on.**

"Married for 25 years. She is a force of nature, all 104 pounds of her. This woman does everything, sings like an angel, dances, cooks, mixes cement, lays tiles, does woodworking, quilts, builds mosaics, gardens, runs her own restaurant with bed and breakfast. She is so alive. She lights up the room every time she walks in with her joy."

#### **10. They love each other -- flaws and all.**

"My wife made a man out of a mess. She allowed me to make mistakes without hating me for it ... she loved me when no one else did ... she made me whole."

#### **11. They feel lucky that they found each other.**

"We've been together for 10 years. He is literally the best person I have ever known. I would do anything for him. We make each other ridiculously happy, it's kind of gross ... We play video games together, go climbing together, cook together, you name it. Sometimes I cannot believe how lucky I am because this relationship is so easy."

#### **12. They support each other.**

"My husband is so supportive in everything I do. He lifts me up when I'm down, always encourages me when I feel discouraged and when I need to talk about my feelings, he's always there to listen. I mean it when I say I married my best friend."

#### **13. They understand that "in sickness and in health" is more than a phrase -- it's a promise.**

"We've been married nine years. Eight years ago I became significantly disabled. We were a two-income house and I took care of pretty much everything at home. And then I couldn't work anymore. I couldn't cook or clean. I couldn't do our grocery shopping or pay

our bills. I know he didn't think he could do it but he does it all. He finished his Ph.D. while still working and having to do all the housework and even down to having to bathe me when I couldn't ... He's a remarkable man and I adore him."

### **An Islamic Perspective:**

Now, for a more Islamic perspective on this matter, I turn again to the information and advice from the writers and experts at Sound Vision—this time from Sister Shahina Siddiqui.

This is the reason I called it "HAPPILY HEREAFTER." So, let's finish on the positive in-sha-Allaah!

### **Fundamentals of a Happy Marriage<sup>32</sup>**

**Faith:** The most basic and essential attribute of a Muslim marriage is the common faith that binds the couple.

Since Islam is a way of life and not just a religion confined to weekly worship, it becomes an integral part of a Muslim's life. The frame of reference shared by the couple eases communication and sharing of values, which is not possible in an interfaith marriage. It is highly recommended that faith play an important role in developing a loving relationship.

For example, as the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) said that when a husband feeds his

wife, he gets a reward for this act and Allaah increases the bond of love between them. So when we love each other for the sake of Allaah, WE ACTUALLY INCREASE OUR FAITH.

**Forgiving:** When the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) asked his Companions, “Do you wish that Allaah should forgive you?” They said, “Of course O Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him).” He responded, “Then forgive each other.”

One of the main components of a happy marriage is that the spouses are able to forgive, that they do not hold grudges or act judgmental towards each other. It is expected that when we live with someone, situations may arise when we end up saying or doing things that hurt them. The challenge is not to dwell on it or lay blame but to move past it. This can only happen if we are not too proud to ask for forgiveness and we are not miserly to forgive.

If we expect Allaah to forgive us then we must learn to forgive others.

**Forget:** When we constantly remind our spouses of all the times they let us down or hurt us, we have not truly forgiven. Things that happened in the past must be left there and not be used as fresh ammunition in new situations. Couples who use this technique, usually fall in a rut and become victims of their own pettiness and are unable to break free.



**Forbearance:** Sabr (patience) is the most useful tool to have in managing a healthy lifestyle. Being patient and forbearing puts us in a proactive frame of mind as it brings us closer to Allaah through Tawakul and reliance. We develop an inner mechanism that empowers us to handle life's difficult moments. As Allaah states in Surah al-Asr: "Surely by time humans are at loss, except those who believe and do righteous deeds and counsel each other to the truth and counsel each other to Sabr" (Qur'an, chapter 103).

**Flexible:** Many couples unnecessarily make themselves miserable because they are unwilling to bend a little.

We should not expect our spouses to be our extensions. They are their own selves with personalities, likes, and dislikes. We must respect their right to be themselves as long as it does not compromise their Deen (religion). Being inflexible and not accommodating for individual differences leads to a very stressful and tense atmosphere at home.

**Friendship:** This aspect of marriage has three components.

First is to develop a friendship with our spouses. The relationship based on friendship is more able to withstand outside pressures.

We honour, trust, respect, accept and care for our friends, in spite of our differences. These are the

aspects of friendship we should bring into our marriages.

Unfortunately, the only aspect that people think of bringing to their marriage, which is highly inappropriate, is the buddy scenario. Shariah (Islamic law) has placed the husband in a leadership role within a family. This requires a certain decorum, which cannot be maintained if the spouses consider each other as pals.

This should not be taken to mean that the husband is a dictator but rather he is a shepherd who is responsible for his flock. This is a position of grave responsibility and places an enormous burden on the husband.

Furthermore, the children need to see their parents as friends but not as pals as this encourages disrespect.

Friendly: **The** second aspect of friendship is to have friendly relations with in-laws. When couples compete as to whose parents are more important, it becomes a constant source of grief. Much valuable time is wasted trying to convince one another of whose parents are more desirable. It is better if we accept that our spouses will not overnight fall in love with our parents just because we want them to. As long as they maintain friendly relations that are cordial and based on mutual respect, we should not force the issue.

Friends: The third aspect of friendship is our circle of friends. It is okay to have individual friends of the same gender but couples must also make effort to have

family friends so that they can socialize together. If there is friction being caused by a certain friendship, it must not be pursued at the expense of the marriage. Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) advised us to choose God-fearing people as friends since we tend to follow their way. Friends should be a source of joy and not mischief.

**Fun:** Couples who do not laugh together have to work on sharing some fun times. The Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) was known to play with his wives. A simple walk in the park can add much spark to the relationship. Taking up a sport together or watching clean funny movies is another way of sharing a laugh.

**Faithful:** It is commanded by Allaah that we be faithful to our spouses. Adultery is a capital crime in Islam that is punishable by death. However, there are various forms of unfaithful behaviour prevalent among some Muslims.

The most common form is maintaining friendships with the opposite sex over the boundaries set by Islam and the misgivings of the spouse. The latest trend of Internet relationships is also contrary to Islamic Adab (etiquette) and is causing serious problems among couples; once a sense of betrayal sets in, repairing that relationship is difficult. Another form of not being faithful is when couples betray confidences. This

becomes a trust issue, even if compromised, it eats away at the heart of a marriage.

**Fair:** Usually when we are angry or displeased the tendency is not to play fair. We try to convince ourselves that since we have been wronged, it is okay to be unjust in our behaviour and our statements. Allaah states in the Qur'an to not be unjust under any circumstances, even if they are your enemy and here we are talking about our life partners and the parent of our children. To use words such as "never" and "always" when describing the behaviour of the partner is unfair and puts the other on the defensive.

**Finance:** One of the most common points of contention in marriages is money. Experts tell us that 80 percent of marital conflicts are about money.

It is therefore highly recommended that the couple put serious time and effort in developing a financial management plan that is mutually agreeable and is reviewed every six months or so. Preparing a budget together is also a helpful and wise way to handle household finances. It should be remembered that the wife's money in Islam is hers to spend as she pleases and therefore it should not be considered family income unless she chooses to contribute to the family expenses.

**Family:** Parenting can be a stressful experience if the parents are not well informed. This, in turn, can put extra pressure on the marriage.

Sometimes couples are naive about the changes that come in their lifestyle. This can cause, in some cases, depression and sometimes resentment and misunderstandings. One golden rule that must always be the guide is that family comes first.

Whenever there is evidence that the family is not happy or is not our first priority, it is time to assemble at the kitchen table and discuss with open hearts and minds. Couples who have elderly parents have an added responsibility to take care of them. This can also be very stressful if the couple is not prepared.

A care plan must be worked out with respective siblings and parents as to who will be the primary caregiver and what type of support network they will have. In case of mental incompetence, a power of attorney must be in place. The making of a will is most essential.

**Feelings:** The Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) stated that Allaah forgives all sins if we repent but not sins we have committed against others like hurting someone's feelings unless the person we have hurt forgives first.

Couples are sometimes very careless when it comes to their spouse's feelings; they take them for granted and assume that the other knows what they mean. It is

surprising that people are more sensitive and courteous to strangers than they are to their loved ones. One must be careful that they do not hurt the feelings of their spouses. If they do, they should apologize as soon as possible. Since one does not know when someone they love will leave this world, is it not better to make amends when we have the time?

**Freedom:** Marriage in Islam is a partnership and not bondage or slavery. To consider the wife one's property is alien to the Islamic concept of a husband and wife role. The team spirit is enhanced and not curtailed when members of the team are free to be themselves. Freedom in the common western sense is to be free to do as one pleases or to be selfish. On the contrary, to allow freedom to one's spouse is to be considerate of their needs and to recognize their limitations.

**Flirtation:** A sure way to keep romance in marriage is to flirt with your spouse. Many successful marriages have maintained a youthful demeanour by adopting special names for each other and secret communication styles.

**Frank:** Misunderstandings happen when couples are not honest with each other. The marital relationship is honest when the partners feel safe enough to speak their mind with due consideration to the other's feeling, without compromising their own views. When the communication is not frank, it hinders the closeness and deep understanding of each other's inner self.

**Facilitator:** When choosing our life partner, we must, as the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) advised, look for a pious Muslim. The reason is that our first and foremost goal is the pleasure of Allaah. This commitment to Allaah makes them an excellent facilitator for enhancing their partner's spiritual development. In essence, the couple facilitates their family's commitment to Allaah and His Deen.

**Flattering:** Paying compliments and indulging in honest flattery is a very inexpensive way to win your spouse's heart. Everyone likes to be appreciated and noticed. So being ungenerous about compliments is actually depriving oneself of being appreciated in return.

**Fulfilling:** To be special to one's spouse is a very fulfilling and rewarding experience. To be in love means to give one's all. The heart does not put conditions or make stipulations. It gives without expecting anything in return but such selfless giving is always rewarded tenfold.

**Fallible:** It often happens that our expectations sometimes are so high that we lose focus of the fact that we are fallible beings. When couples start to nitpick and demand the impossible, they must remind themselves that only Allaah is perfect.

**Fondness:** So many times couples fail to work on developing a fondness for each other by seeing their

spouses as people through the eyes of their respective friends. Spending quality time alone and sharing activities are ways in which one can develop a fondness.

**Future:** Smart couples plan for their future together. They work on their financial and retirement plans, make wills and discuss these plans with their children. This provides peace of mind and secures the relationship.



## **A Final Word**

As the Shahadah is a commitment between us and Allaah, we must also be committed to one another. As the Salah (Prayer) rejuvenates us, we must also rejuvenate one another. As the Zakat (Alms) purifies our wealth and Akhlaq (manners), we must also purify our intentions and Akhlaq towards one another. As Sawm (fasting) teaches us Taqwa (Piety), we must also fast from harming one another. As Hajj (Pilgrimage) is a cherished opportunity, we must also cherish the opportunity we have with one another.

May Allaah (SWT) make our homes a home sweet home and make us leaders for the Mutaqeen (pious).

Aameen.

Jazakum Allaahu khyrun for taking the time and for investing in your future.

Your brother in Islam,

Alaa Elsayed

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## About the Author

Sheikh Alaa Elsayed was born in Cairo and lived in Egypt until he was 15 years old. During his youth, he spent his time as a goalie for the country's Junior National Team for soccer and later moved to Toronto, Canada in the late 1970s.

Sheikh Alaa worked as the Vice-President of Business Development for an international company and, during this time, he competed and placed first in the 1992 Bermuda Triathlon. He also trained in conflict resolution, crisis management, six sigma, communication skills, advance train the trainer and inclusion training. He teaches several Islamic courses around the world. These include, "Home Sweet Home," which covers the relationship between spouses, "Parenting Matters," which covers the relationship between parents and children, and "Eternal Home," which covers the relationship between the whole family with Allaah (SWT).

Sheikh Alaa studied for his Bachelors in Shariah at the American International University in Egypt and then earned a scholarship from the Shariah Academy in Florida. He has also received his ijāzah of Qur'an recitation for Ḥafṣ'an 'Āṣim and studied comparative religion for five years through the IPCI in South Africa. He was also on the board of directors of the World Assembly of Muslim Youth.

Sheikh Alaa currently lives in the GTA (Greater Toronto Area) with his wife and three children. He is a member of the Canadian Council of Imams as well as a member of Horizon Interfaith Communication Media Council. Prior to this, he was an Imam for the Muslim Council of Calgary and acted as its media spokesperson. He has hosted Vision of Islam, a weekly television show which runs throughout Alberta, Canada. He has also appeared as a speaker on Islamic issues for various television channels, including Peace TV.

Sheikh Alaa was a member of the Calgary Multi-Faith Committee and a member of the Muslim Christian Dialogue Committee. He received the Alberta Centennial award from the Alberta Government in 2005, which was granted to him for his outstanding service to the Alberta community. He later also received recognition from the City of Mississauga as well as the Members of Council for his leadership role in 2015.

Sheikh Alaa is currently the Resident Scholar at ISNA - Canada. Previously he served as Director of Religious Affairs for the ISNA - Islamic Centre of Canada. Prior to that, he was the Executive Director for the Canadian Islamic Congress. Sheikh Alaa is a favourite tutor with AlKauthar Institute and a Director of Public Relations for Mercy Mission World.