

Chapter Two

Engagement

Love in Islam

Before we start studying the individual rights of each spouse, we would like to discuss a noble feeling that we hope to see prevalent between married couples, because it perfectly helps in the fulfillment of those rights. That feeling is called love that is selectively infused by Allah into the hearts of His creation.

Love is an instinct. If it were not for love, all of humanity would have no hope of continuity and multiplication. It is an intrinsic quality that cannot be suppressed or withdrawn from life. Adam felt a need for Eve as soon as he entered the Garden.

It was reported that while Adam was asleep, Allah created Eve from his rib. When he woke up and found her beside him he said, “Who are you?” She said, “A woman.” He continued, “What is your name?” She answered, “Eve.” He further said, “Why were you created?” She said, “So that you may seek repose through me.” This indicates that she was the symbol of comfort. The words, “seek repose through me” do not suggest that she is his slave or property. Rather, they indicate that for Adam, and for every Adam on Earth until the day of resurrection, there is no repose or comfort except at Eve’s side. This is our religion and our understanding of Islam.

The love we mean here is not a mere passion that quickly wanes. Rather, it is a deeply entrenched, long-lived feeling, and is a blessing from Allah. The Prophet (pbuh) said, “*I was provided with her love,*”¹ in reference to Lady Khadijah.

¹ Reported by Muslim.

Marriage may very well start with emotional passivity that quickly evolves into developing feelings of love between the married couple as a result of noble consorting, manners and loyalty. When that happens, the couple starts to enjoy a happy life together. Allah says,

[And among His Signs is this, that He created for you mates from among yourselves, that you may dwell in tranquility with them, and He has put love and mercy between your (hearts): verily in that are Signs for those who reflect]

(Ar-Rum: 21)

Examples of true love

Anyone who claims that the sweetest love stories are those of Romeo and Juliet and the like all such stories never ended with marriage, which is the true test of love. True love can only end with marriage and continue afterwards, even after any one of the partners dies. The following stories are examples of this.

Love between the Prophet (pbuh) and his wives

- **Love between the Prophet (pbuh) and his wife Khadijah:**

Lady Khadijah was the epitome of great love and eternal faithfulness. One year after she died, a woman Companion came to the Prophet (pbuh) and said, “O Messenger of Allah, why do you not marry?” At that time, the Prophet (pbuh) had seven children, in addition to the immense responsibilities of the Message. Marriage was the only option for a man under such conditions. However, the Prophet (pbuh) cried and replied, “*Can there be anyone after Khadijah?*”

One day, while the Prophet (pbuh) was with Lady `A'ishah at home, he heard someone outside ask for permission to enter. His face immediately expressed delight and he said, "*Allah, Allah, this sounds like Khadijah's when she asked for permission. O Allah, let it be Halah, the sister of Khadijah.*" And so she was! Praise be to Allah, how he remembered even her way of asking for permission many years after her death.

Another incident occurred on the day of the Conquest of Makkah. While the Prophet (pbuh) was busy with the affairs of the Quraysh, an old woman came from a distance. The Prophet (pbuh) made way for her and stood talking to her at length. Then he spread his garment for her to sit on, and sat with her on the ground, and then they went on talking. When he finished, Lady `A'ishah (may Allah be pleased with her) asked him, "Who is she?" The Prophet (pbuh) said, "*She is a friend of Khadijah's.*" Again she asked him, "And what were you talking about for so long?" He replied, "*We were recalling the old days; the days of Khadijah.*" Lady `A'ishah felt jealous and said, "You still remember that old lady after she has been buried although Allah gave you someone better instead?" - in reference to herself. The Prophet (pbuh) then said, "*No, by Allah. Allah did not give me someone better instead of her. She consoled me when the people dismissed me and believed me when the people disbelieved me.*" Lady `A'ishah said remorsefully, "Pray for my forgiveness, O Messenger of Allah." He said, "*No, you pray for Khadijah's forgiveness first if you want me to pray for your forgiveness.*" What kind of love is this!

Lady `A'ishah was reported to have said, "I never felt jealous of any wife of the Prophet (pbuh) as I did of Khadijah. Although I never saw her, the Prophet (pbuh) used to mention her a lot." (In another version: because he used to mention her and praise her a lot). Sometimes, he would slaughter a sheep,

then divide it and send the parts to the friends of Lady Khadijah. Sometimes I would say, 'It seems as if there were no women in this world other than Khadijah!' He would reply, '*She was and was (counting her virtues), and she brought me children.*'"

As for Lady Khadijah's love for the Prophet (pbuh), it was clear in her pleasant reception, comfort at times of difficulty, and assurance. Lady `A'ishah was reported to have said, "The commencement of the Divine Inspiration to Allah's Messenger was in the form of good dreams which came true like broad daylight, and then the love of seclusion was bestowed upon him. He used to go in seclusion in the cave of Hira' where he used to worship Allah alone continuously for many days before his desire to see his family. He used to take with him provision for the stay and then come back to (his wife) Lady Khadijah to take his food like-wise again till suddenly the Truth descended upon him while he was in the cave. The angel came to him and asked him to read. He (pbuh) replied, '*I do not (know how to) read.*' Then he went to Khadijah and said, '*Cover me! Cover me!*' They covered him till his fear was dispelled and after that he told her everything that had happened and said, '*I fear that something (bad) may happen to me.*' Lady Khadijah replied, 'Never! By Allah, Allah will never disgrace you. You keep good relations with your kith and kin, help the poor and the destitute, serve your guests generously, and assist the deserving calamity-afflicted ones.' Khadijah then accompanied him to her cousin Waraqah ibn Nawfal, who had become Christian during the pre-Islamic period and used to write in Hebrew. He would write from the Gospel in Hebrew as much as Allah wished him to write. He was an old man and had lost his eyesight. Lady Khadijah said to Waraqah, 'O cousin, listen to your nephew.' Waraqah

asked, 'O my nephew! What have you seen?' The Messenger of Allah described what he had seen. Waraqah said, 'This is the same one who keeps the secrets (angel Gabriel) whom Allah had sent to Musa. I wish I were young and could live to the time when your people would turn you out.' The Messenger of Allah asked, '*Will they drive me out?*' Waraqah replied in the affirmative and said, 'Anyone (man) who came with something similar to what you have brought was treated with hostility; and if I should remain alive till the day when you will be turned out then I would support you strongly.'"¹

We also find a confirmation of Lady Khadijah's love for the Prophet (pbuh) in what he said, "*She believed me when the people disbelieved me, and she supported me with her money.*"²

• **Love between the Prophet (pbuh) and his wife `A'ishah:**

Have you ever asked someone about his most beloved person and got "My wife" for an answer? Never have we heard of a great man, poet, or lover in this world who expressed this explicitly. However, the Prophet (pbuh) said it simply, specifying his wife's name when `Amr ibn al-`As asked him, "Who is the person you love most?" He replied, "*A'ishah.*"

Another incident occurred when some Ethiopian men and boys were performing a spear-dance, and the people of Medina went out to watch them. Lady `A'ishah told the Prophet (pbuh) that she would like to watch them too, so he went out to the door and stretched out his arm for Lady `A'ishah to lean her head on his shoulder while standing behind him. The Prophet (pbuh) repeatedly asked her, "*Have you had enough?*" and she would answer negatively. She said,

¹ Reported by al-Bukhari and Muslim.

² Reported by Ahmad.

“By Allah, I was bored, but I wanted to know how dear I was to him, and by Allah he never lifted his hand until I told him that I had had enough.”

• **Lady `A`ishah’s love for the Prophet (pbuh):**

Dhakwan was reported to have quoted Lady `A`ishah as saying, “One of the favors bestowed by Allah on me is that the Prophet (pbuh) died in my house, on my day, and on my chest, and that Allah joined my saliva with his at the time of his death. `Abd ar-Rahman (son of Abu Bakr) entered with the *Siwak* (natural toothbrush) in his hand while I had the Prophet (pbuh) leaning on me. I saw him look at it and knew that he liked the *Siwak*. I asked him, ‘Shall I get it for you?’ He nodded, so I took it but it was too hard for him. I asked him, ‘Shall I soften it for you?’ He nodded, so I softened it for him and he used it to brush his teeth. [In another version: ‘I clipped it, cleaned it, and put scent on it, and then gave it to the Prophet (pbuh). He used it to brush his teeth better than I had ever seen him do before.’] [And in a third version: ‘So, Allah joined my saliva with his on his last day in this world and his first day in the afterworld.’] There was a small vessel of water made of leather in front of the Prophet (pbuh), and he kept immersing his hands in the water then wiping his face with them, saying, ‘*La Ilaha illa Allah (There is no god but Allah), verily, death has severe agonies.*’ Then, he raised his hand and repeatedly said, ‘To the Sublime Company,’ until he died and his hand dropped.”

• **The Prophet (pbuh) and his wife Umm Salamah:**

Lady Umm Salamah was reported to have quoted the Prophet (pbuh) as saying, “*Any Muslim who is afflicted with a misfortune and says what Allah commanded him; to say, ‘Truly! To Allah we belong and truly to Him we shall return. O Allah reward*

me for my misfortune and replace it with something better,' will be compensated by something better than it from Allah." Lady Umm Salamah then said, "When Abu Salamah died I said, 'Which Muslim can be better than Abu Salamah, the first household to emigrate to the Prophet (pbuh)?' Then I said it [the abovementioned supplication], and Allah compensated me by the Prophet (pbuh)."¹

Lady Sarah and Prophet Ibrahim (pbuh)

Two of the most wonderful spouses were Lady Sarah and Prophet Ibrahim. They lived together for eighty years without having any children. Eighty years passed and not once did Ibrahim (pbuh) think of hurting Lady Sarah by expressing a wish to marry another woman for the sake of offspring. However, it was Lady Sarah who urged him persistently to do so. Therefore, he married Lady Hajar, Isma`il's mother.

Prophet Musa (pbuh) and the daughter of Shu`ayb

The Glorious Qur'an tells that when Musa left Egypt and went to Madyan (Midian), where he arrived extremely exhausted, he found a well from which men were watering their herds, while two women stood back with theirs. He briefly asked them what the matter was, and they explained to him that they could not water their herd until the shepherds left and cleared the way. They also mentioned that their father was a very old man, thus their need to assume this task arose. So, he watered their herd for them in an act of outstanding chivalry, and then went to rest in the shade.

¹ Reported by Muslim.

In the meantime, the girls went to their father and told him what had happened. The father asked them to bring the young man over. One of them walked to him shyly and said, “My father is inviting you,” (i.e. not me, my father). She did not say, “Come to my home,” nor did she say to her father, “I want to marry this man and I will, whether you like it or not!” The girl admired the young man and the intelligent father sensed that, so he offered him one of his two daughters for marriage at his choice. Such is a model, dignified and noble relationship.

`Umar (may Allah be pleased with him) and his wives

Indeed, `Umar ibn al-Khattab (may Allah be pleased with him) loved his wife. He expressed his love to a friend who came to complain about his wife’s loud voice, only to find `Umar totally passive regarding his own wife’s loud voice. `Umar explained this to the other Companion by saying, “She has tolerated me, washed my clothes, made my bed, raised my children, and cleaned my house. She has done all of that willingly, without being commanded to do so by Allah. Against the tolerance she has shown, would it be too much for me to tolerate her loud voice?”

`Umar also loved his wife Kulthum, the daughter of `Ali (may Allah be pleased with him). They were so attached to each other that `Umar died on a Monday, and she literally followed him on the following day, Tuesday!

Love and failure

All the previously mentioned ideas and scenes of love between spouses prove that love is a beautiful and required quality, and that an Islamic view does exist in this regard.

However, we must be very clear on the type of love intended in this context. Is it the boyfriend-girlfriend type of relationships? Is it the “customary” undocumented marriage? Is it the love that precedes engagement and marriage? If the latter is the correct answer, then why do marriages that result from this type fail in most cases? Why was the premarital love so sweet, only to be followed by a ridiculous failure of a marriage? The answer is simply that such love was not permissible, and that it was brought forth under the patronage, arrangement, and justification of the devil. When marriage actually took place, the devil kept at work, only this time with a view to destroy the legitimate marital relation by raising hatred in the heart of each partner towards the other.

Losses of girls

We need to take a look at the losses inflicted upon girls as a result of such relationships that have come to be known as “love”. We also need to discuss the reasons for forbidding this type; are they for the benefit of girls or just for the sake of stifling them?

We all know that a girl who goes through the experience of failure after one of these relations is exposed to a great deal of psychological damage. She feels heartbroken and humiliated. That is the first loss. For that reason, the Glorious Qur’an tells us that women should not have illicit relations with men as a means of protecting them. The second loss is the inevitable collapse of the marital bond that results from such a relation, as mentioned previously. The third loss is that the girl loses a great deal of her modesty when she develops such a relation. Gradually, she will find herself changing, doing things she would have never imagined that her femininity would permit her to do.

When a happy married couple were asked about the secret behind their happiness and how they managed to keep their love glowing for a long time after marriage, they answered that obeying Allah and committing to His Commandments regarding their relation before and after marriage was the reason. They prevented themselves from having any illicit relation, lowered their gaze and never crossed the limits set by Allah. They preserved their chastity for the sake of Allah and in return Allah preserved their love.

True love

Now an important question arises: until the time for marriage comes, what do we do? Whom do we love? And the answer is: How about experiencing the love of Allah.

Selectivity

Islam has established a number of principles, teachings and rules that, if followed in selecting one's spouse, would guarantee a stable, happy and successful marriage.

Selection criteria of a good wife

1. Win the religious wife

To make a good choice of a wife, one should pay more attention to her religion and morals rather than her status, wealth or beauty. On the authority of Abu Hurayrah, the Prophet (pbuh) said, "A woman is married for four reasons; her money (wealth), her beauty, her status (family name), and her religion. So choose the one who is religious, may your hands cleave to dust (i.e. may you not prosper)." ¹

Imam ash-Sha`rawi, (may Allah have mercy on him), interpreted the requirement in the previous *hadith* as not to focus solely on one angle of physical beauty, but rather on all angles. On considering the angle that preoccupies all people, namely beauty of appearance, we will find that in reality it is the least significant, most temporal aspect of a woman. What lasts throughout the journey are virtues of honesty, sincerity, and good management, with religion at the very top of them all.

¹ Agreed upon.

`Abdullah ibn `Amr reported Allah's Messenger (pbuh) as saying,

“The whole world is a provision, and the best object of benefit of the world is the pious woman.”¹

The Prophet (pbuh) was also reported as saying,

“Four are from happiness; the righteous woman, the luxurious big house, the pious neighbor and the comfortable ride. Four are from misery; the bad woman, the bad neighbor, the bad ride and the small house.”²

Commenting on verse 23, in *Surah An-Nisa'*, Imam ash-Sha`rawi said in his interpretation of the Glorious Qur'an,

[... Except for these, all others are lawful, provided you seek (them in marriage) with gifts from your own property desiring chastity, not lust.]

(An-Nisa': 24)

The fragment 'with gifts from your own property' clearly indicates that financial compensation is the duty of men. The verse directs men to investing wealth that has been earned by hard work in seeking benefits in both the short and long terms.

It is essential to note that if a wife is not a believer, she will raise children in accordance with her polytheistic beliefs. The role of fathers in raising children does not come in until a long period of time has passed, at which point it will not be quite effective because most principles will be deeply settled by then. Neglecting the criteria set forth by Allah in starting a marriage and then expecting problems to be solved by Allah

¹ Reported by Muslim.

² Reported by al-Hakim and al-Bayhaqi and verified by al-Albani.

and those in charge of applying His System would be unfair both to the person and to the parties involved.

2. The pure and chaste woman

The Mother of the Believers, Lady `A`ishah (may Allah be pleased with her) was asked about the best of women. She said, “She is the one who never speaks ill-manneredly, who doesn’t know the tricks of cheating men, whose heart is void except of the idea of ornamentation for her husband, the one who maintains the protection of her family.”

3. The devout and obedient woman

The Prophet (pbuh) said,

“If a woman performs her prayers, fasts her month (Ramadan), guards her sexual parts (i.e. preserves her chastity) and obeys her husband, she will enter Paradise by any gate she likes.”¹

4. That one who belongs to a good family

5. The kind and fertile woman

The Prophet (pbuh) said,

“Won’t I tell you about your women of Paradise? (They are) the compassionate, the fertile and the caring, who, when oppressed, would say: “Here is my hand in yours, I will not taste sleep until you are satisfied.”

6. The soft, lenient and easy going woman

The Prophet (pbuh) said,

“Won’t I tell you about those whom the Hell fire will be prohibited from (burning) tomorrow [on the Day of

¹ Reported by Ibn Hibban and verified by al-Albani.

Judgment]? It's every soft mannered, lenient, and easy going woman.”¹

7. The one characterized by good manners and patience

Ibn Ju'dubah was reported to have said, “There was a man among the Quraysh known for his bad manners, but was rich and generous. Every time this man married, he would shortly break up with his wife due to his bad manners and her intolerance. Once he proposed to a woman of great status from the Quraysh. She heard bad things about him, and he told her about his bad manners for which she would need patience. She answered him that a person who stimulates his bad manners would be of even worse manners. So, she married him and they had no arguments until they were separated by death.”

8. The one free of defects or chronic diseases (such as insanity, leprosy, skin diseases and diabetes)

9. A man who has never been married before is recommended to marry a virgin

The Prophet (pbuh) said,

“Why not a virgin, so that you may play with her and she may play with you?”

However, this does not forbid marriage to divorcees or widows.

10. Beware of those women

“Beware of those women” is an Arab saying that warn against marriage to seven types of women:

¹ Reported by at-Tirmidhi and verified by al-Albani.

- A shrew or a woman who always complains and moans, and ties a band around her head every hour [feigns sickness].
- A woman who always reminds her husband of her favors upon him.
- A woman who has a yearning for another man or longs to get a son from another man.
- A woman whose eye is always roaming around things and desiring them, thus requiring her husband to buy them for her.
- A woman who spends most of her time in primping herself until she is shining in appearance not for her husband.
- A woman who goes into rage during meals, and thus always eats alone and reserves her share in everything.
- A garrulous woman.

Selection criteria of a good husband

1. A woman and her guardians should choose a husband of a noble character and prioritize the one whose faith and morals are satisfactory. Acceptance of a man proposing to a woman should be judged on basis of how religious he is. The Prophet (pbuh) said,

“If a man, who satisfies you in faith and morals proposes to you, accept him. If you don’t, you will create sedition on the earth and widespread corruption.”¹

He also said,

“When you get your daughter married, let her marry a man of faith; if he loves her, he will treat her nobly, and if he hates her, he will not be unfair.”

¹ Reported by at-Tirmidhi, Ibn Majah and al-Hakim.

2. It is recommended that a woman should select a man who is knowledgeable about the Glorious Qur'an and the noble *Sunnah* of the Prophet (pbuh), so that he may enlighten her accordingly. This is only an advantage of course.
3. How to evaluate a man's good conduct: `Umar ibn al-Khattab (may Allah be pleased with him) relied on three parameters in evaluating the conduct of a man. He asked, "Have you transacted business with him? Have you ever traveled with him? Has he ever been your neighbor? If not, then don't judge the man because you have not actually dealt with him yet."
4. Good family lineage: If a woman is proposed to by two men who are equally religious but differ in family lineage, then precedence should be given to the one with better family lineage, provided the other is not more religious. In the latter case, the most religious should be given precedence.
5. It is preferable that the man be financially capable. The Prophet (pbuh) said to Fatimah bint Qays, "*As to Mu'awiyah, he is a penniless pauper ...*" However, if a wealthy and a religious person compete, then the latter gains precedence, because the financial ability advantage is only applied to cases of equality in religiousness.
6. It is also preferable that the man be affectionate and gentle with women. The Prophet (pbuh) said to Fatimah bint Qays, "*As to Abu Jahm, he never lays his stick off his shoulder (i.e. he was known for beating women).*"
7. It is recommended for a woman to avoid marrying a sterile man, because the Prophet (pbuh) will take pride in

outnumbering the other nations with his nation on the Day of Resurrection.

8. It is recommended for a woman to marry a man free of defects or chronic diseases (such as insanity, leprosy, skin diseases and diabetes).

General considerations for selectivity

In addition to the previous selection criteria of each spouse, the following should be taken into consideration:

1. The woman's right to choose her husband

Families should respect their daughter's right to choose her husband, whether she is a virgin or a matron.

2. Religious and moral equivalence

It is recommended that there exists a state of religious and moral equivalence between the bride and the bridegroom. Scholars of jurisprudence set equivalence and similarity between potential husbands and wives as a prerequisite to marriage. For this, Allah said,

[Women impure are for men impure, and men impure for women impure. And women of purity are for men of purity, and men of purity are for women of purity: These are not affected by what people say: For them there is forgiveness and a provision honorable.]

(An-Nur: 26)

The verse shows that equivalence is important even in terms of merit and defect. It is not reasonable to have a good man marry a vicious woman who would only be a source of discomfort. Under the same logic, it is equally unreasonable to wed a woman of merits to a man of vices.

3. Social and cultural equivalence

It is also recommended that there exists a state of equivalence between the bride and the bridegroom on bases of social, educational and cultural levels. Do not marry a woman who thinks she is doing you a favor by marrying you. If you do, your life will be a continuous suffering and misery, because you might feel beholden to your wife and thus yield to her as the partner with the upper hand, losing your status and self-esteem. Alternatively, you might demand your right to custodianship, leadership, and responsibility, and in this case your partner will not submit to you, because she would always see you as an inferior partner. In both cases, problems are inevitable and it would be best to avoid such a marriage. Scholars advise that women should marry someone of equivalent status or above, but that men should marry someone of equivalent status or below. This is because the status of the wife and children will rise or fall according to the husband's position; if a woman marries someone of a lower status, she may come to resent the loss of her status, which will affect the stability of the family.

4. Compatibility

You should not marry a woman who is the exact opposite of you in taste and interests, because these are the elements of your marital life's pleasure. The wider the gap between you is, the less enjoyable your marital life will be. Conversely, the more habits, characteristics, and interests you have in common, the more happy and likely to succeed you will be.

5. A man may offer his daughter or sister for marriage to righteous men

The Glorious Qur'an reveals the story of the Prophets Shu`ayb and Musa (peace be upon them):

[He said, 'I intend to wed one of these, my daughters to you, on condition that you serve me for eight years; but if you complete ten years, it will be (grace) from you. But I intend not to place you under a difficulty: you will find me, indeed, if Allah wills, one of the righteous.]

(Al-Qasas: 27)

Ways of Engagement Known in the *Sunnah*

There are several ways found in the *Sunnah* (prophetic tradition) for engagement:

1. Engagement through the woman's family

It was reported that `Umar (may Allah be pleased with him) said, "Allah's Messenger (pbuh) asked for Hafsa's hand (i.e. proposed to Hafsa), and I gave her in marriage to him."¹

2. Engagement through direct contact with the woman

The books of jurisprudence refer to this situation as "Proposing directly to a woman of age." It is reported that Lady Umm Salamah (may Allah be pleased with her) said, "The Messenger of Allah (pbuh) sent Hatib ibn Balta`ah asking me to marry him (to the Messenger of Allah). So I told him, 'But I have a daughter and I am a jealous (woman)'. Then, he (the Prophet of Allah) said, 'As for her daughter we ask Allah to compensate her and I ask Allah to take away jealousy (from her heart).'"²

Another authentic *hadith* is reported by Anas in which he said, "Abu Talhah proposed to Umm Sulaym, but she said to him, 'By Allah, you are among those men who no one can reject, but you are an atheist and I am a Muslim woman. Therefore, it is illegal for me to marry you. However, if you

¹ Reported by al-Bukhari.

² Reported by Muslim.

become a Muslim, this (your conversion) shall be my dowry and I will not ask you any more'. So he embraced Islam and that was her dowry.”¹

3. The girl’s father or guardian proposes the matter to a man with satisfactory ethics and religion

Imam al-Bukhari named this situation: “A man offering his daughter or sister to righteous people.”

‘Abdullah ibn ‘Umar said that when Hafsa, ‘Umar’s daughter, became a widow due to the death of her husband, the Companion ibn Hudhafah as-Sahmi who was one of the warriors of Badr and who died in Medina, ‘Umar said, “I met ‘Uthman ibn ‘Affan and gave him an offer, saying: If you wish, I will marry Hafsa to you. He replied, 'I will think it over.' I waited for a few days, and then he met me and said, 'I have made up my mind not to marry at present.' Then I met Abu Bakr and said to him: If you wish, I will marry Hafsa to you. Abu Bakr kept silent and did not come back to me. Thus, I was angrier with Him than I was with ‘Uthman. Days passed and then Allah’s Messenger asked for her hand, so I married her to him. Later, Abu Bakr met me and said, 'Nothing stopped me from responding to your offer except that I knew that Allah’s Messenger had mentioned (his wish to marry) her, and I could never let out the secret of Allah’s Messenger. If he had left her, I would have accepted her.”

The above-mentioned title provided by al-Bukhari reminds us of the act of Shu‘ayb (pbuh), when he offered one of his two daughters to Musa (pbuh).

¹ Reported by an-Nasa’i.

Almighty Allah said,

[He said, 'I intend to wed one of these, my daughters to thee, on condition that you serve me for eight years; but if you complete ten years, it will be (grace) from you. But I intend not to place you under a difficulty: you will find me, indeed, if Allah wills, one of the righteous. He said, 'Be that (the agreement) between me and you: whichever of the two terms I fulfill, let there be no ill-will to me. Be Allah Witness to what we say.]

(Al-Qasas: 27-28)

4. A man proposes to a woman through the senior member of the community

Sahl ibn Sa`d as-Sa`idi narrated, "A woman came to the Prophet (pbuh). A Companion got up and said, 'O Allah's Messenger! If you are not in need of her, then marry her to me.' The Prophet (pbuh) said, 'Go, I marry her to you for that much of the *Qur'an* which you have.'"¹

5. A woman offers herself to a righteous man

Thabit al-Banani narrated, "I was with Anas while his daughter was present with him. Anas said, 'A woman came to Allah's Messenger and presented herself to him, saying, 'O Allah's Messenger, do you have any desire for me (i.e. would you like to marry me)?' Thereupon Anas' daughter said, 'What a shameless lady she is! Shame! Shame!' Anas said, 'She was better than you; she had a liking for the Prophet so she offered herself in marriage to him.'"²

¹ Reported by al-Bukhari & Muslim.

² Reported by al-Bukhari.

6. Hints of proposal during the waiting period (for widows and final divorcees)

Almighty Allah says,

[There is no blame on you if you make an offer of betrothal or hold it in your hearts. Allah knows that you cherish them in your hearts: But do not make a secret contract with them except in terms honorable, nor resolve on the tie of marriage till the term prescribed is fulfilled. And know that Allah Knows what is in your hearts, and take heed of Him; and know that Allah is Oft-forgiving, Most Forbearing.]

(Al-Baqarah: 235)

In *Tafsir Al-Jalalayn* (An exegesis of the Glorious Qur'an), we find examples of such allusive proposals in phrases like, "You are truly beautiful", "How can one like you be found?" and "Someone has an interest in you."

Two Suitors Seeking to Marry the Same Woman

The Prophet (pbuh) disapproved of two persons competing with one another to marry the same woman. This is because such a situation is likely to develop into bitter enmity between two Muslim brothers.

The Prophet (pbuh) said,

“A believer is a brother of a believer. Hence it is not lawful for him to outbid his brother, nor propose for (the hand of a woman) after the marriage proposal of his brother, until the latter (voluntarily) withdraws.”

Muslim scholars, Abu Hanifah, Shafi`i and Malik, all hold the view that it is a sin to forward a proposal of marriage against the proposal of another Muslim. However, if a marriage is contracted in this wrongful way it will be sufficient if the second suitor who was successful seeks the forgiveness of the first suitor and of Allah.

Moreover, if a man proposes to a woman and they see each other, but the woman shows no signs of liking or approval towards him, then another man may propose to her as well. The decisive factor here is the approval and liking of the woman. Conversely, if the woman demonstrated approval and liking towards the suitor, then no other man may propose to her unless the current engagement is dropped.

The evidence supporting permissibility of another man proposing to her when she expresses no liking is found in a *hadith* narrated by Muslim as follows:

“Fatimah bint Qays informed the Prophet (pbuh) that both Mu`awiyah ibn Abi Sufyan and Abu Jahm proposed to her. The Prophet (pbuh) thus said, ‘As to Abu-Jahm, he never lays his stick off his shoulder, and as to Mu`awiyah, he is a penniless pauper. Marry Usamah ibn Zayd.’ She expressed disapproval, but the Prophet (pbuh) repeated, ‘Marry Usamah.’ So, she married him and Allah granted her a lot of good through him and she was happy with him.”

A number of scholars support the above-mentioned opinion, including Imam Malik (may Allah bestow mercy upon him) who said: “The *hadith* of the Prophet (pbuh) ‘None of you may follow the engagement of his brother with an engagement for himself’ as we understand it - and Allah knows best - refers to a situation where a man proposes to a woman and she shows a liking towards him, they agree to a certain dowry, and she sets conditions, then no other man may propose to the same woman.”¹

¹ *Al-Muwatta*’, p. 523.

Engagement in Islam (Premarital Preparatory Step)

The importance of the engagement period

Engagement is a preparatory stage for marriage that represents a good opportunity to produce harmony between the engaged couple. As the right to free choice is well established for each potential partner, it would be better exercised if the choice is made in an educated manner through adequate acquaintance with each other.

When a man decides to propose to a girl and informs her family, they present her with this proposal. It would be preferable for the subsequent acquaintance not to be limited to physical appearance, but also to include familiarization with the character in general. This can be achieved through a meeting attended by some relatives, where both can see each other in proximity and explore the overall characteristics of each other as well. Based on the outcome of such a meeting, they can decide whether to accept or refuse. All of this should be preceded by obtaining reasonable information about the character of each other through common acquaintances.

The role of family and friends

It is expected that family and friends will play a big role in finding out all possible details about the character and circumstances of the proposed partner before allowing the feelings of the man and woman to be aroused. This has

several advantages. Its effect is to avoid a lot of the embarrassment, temptation and heartache which are common in the western system of courtship and intimate relations before marriage.

On accepting the general condition of the potential groom, the bride's guardians should facilitate such a meeting between the prospective matrimonial couple so that they can see and get to know each other's character. It should be known that leniency and facility are essential characteristics of our religion in all matters of life, and are particularly indicative of a woman's blessing when observed in her engagement process.

Sight upon proposal

The majority of scholars state that there is no harm of the prospect wife being seen by her suitor, provided that he sees nothing but her face and hands. This initial look is meant to be the messenger of warmth and affection. For that reason, the Prophet (pbuh) encouraged a man who intended to marry a certain woman to look at her.

Al-Mughirah ibn Shu`bah narrated that he proposed to a woman, so the Prophet (pbuh) told him,

“Look at her for it is better to maintain a long lasting warm affection between both of you.”¹

This prophetic command ‘look at her’ certainly indicates, if not obligation, a recommendation. This very purpose would be better achieved if the woman sees the suitor and feels comfortable with him as a potential partner. Can a woman

¹ Reported by at-Tirmidhi.

who expresses a wish to seek encouraging aspects in the appearance of the suitor be considered erroneous? Abu Is-haq ash-Shirazi, the author of *al-Muhadhdhab*, said, "A woman may look at the man she wishes to marry, because women are attracted to things in men in the same way men are attracted to things in women."

Muhammad ibn Salamah said, "I intended to marry a woman, so I used to hide and watch her till I had a look at her. Then he was asked, 'How can you do such a deed while you are a Companion of the Messenger of Allah?' He replied, 'I heard the Messenger of Allah (pbuh) say: *When Allah throws in the heart of a man the tendency to marry a certain woman, so, there's no harm when he looks at her.*'"¹

However, it should be noted that Islam orders Muslims, males and females, to lower their gaze in circumstances other than marriage proposals as a means of protection for them.²

***Istikharah*³ prayer before engagement**

If the man and woman feel comfortable about the engagement, it is preferable for them both to perform the *Istikharah* prayer before proceeding, seeking success and help from Allah.

Jabir ibn `Abdullah said that the Prophet (pbuh) used to teach us the *Istikharah* for each and every matter just as he used to teach us the *Surah* of the Glorious Qur'an. (He used to say),

¹ Reported by Ibn Majah.

² Magda Amer, *Secrets of Lowering the Gaze*, Al-Falah Foundation, 2003.

³ A special prayer in which one appeals to Allah to guide him on the right way regarding a certain deed or situation with which one is confronted.

“If anyone of you intends to do something, he should offer a two-Rak`ah prayer other than the obligatory prayer, and then say: O Allah! I consult You, for You have all knowledge, and appeal to You to support me with Your Power and ask for Your Bounty, for You are able to do things while I am not, and You know while I do not; and You are the Knower of the Unseen. O Allah If You know that this matter (name your matter) is good for me in my religion, my livelihood and for my life in the Hereafter (or he said: for my present and future life), then fulfill it for me and make it easy for me, and then bestow Your Blessings on me in that matter. O Allah! If You know that this matter is not good for me in my religion, my livelihood and my life in the hereafter (or he said: for my present and future life), then keep it away from me and divert me from it, and ordain for me what is good wherever it may be, and make me be pleased with it.”¹

The purpose of *Istikharah*, as understood from the *hadith*, is the expression of total reliance on Allah and leaving the final choice of what is best to Him. However, such reliance and submission cannot be valid unless the concerned people exert their utmost efforts to seek what is good and reach a decision within their limits. Only at that point may they resort to the Knowledge and Power of Allah, seeking success in carrying out the adopted decision if it is good or driving it away if not. After the *Istikharah*, the person must proceed with the matter without waiting for a dream or feelings of comfort, because none of that is mentioned in the *hadith*, and this may even lead to reluctance due to the natural variation in

¹ Reported by al-Bukhari.

feelings from time to time based on the positive and negative elements of the matter that was the subject of *Istikharah*.

Proper manners during engagement

1. Overlapping engagements are not allowed

Ibn `Umar (may Allah be pleased with them both) said, “The Prophet decreed that one should not outbid another in a transaction, nor should he make a proposal of marriage upon the proposal made by someone else, unless the first suitor gives up or allows him to ask for her hand”.¹

2. Dealing with the fiancé as a strange man

Engagement is an introduction to the marriage contract, not a contract in itself. As such, a fiancé is allowed nothing above a strange man. The bride-to-be should maintain her full attire, and never meet him in private. The couple should not be hasty while still engaged and seek satisfying their physical desires since it is still unlawful. When the physical desires take over, the rational judgment of the couple regarding proceeding with the marriage will become ineffective.

The Muslim couple should avoid committing sinful acts to maintain the Blessings of Allah in their relationship.

They should know that whoever rushes an act before its ordained time might be divinely afflicted by losing it, and that whoever sacrifices a desire for the sake of Allah, Allah will reward him a much better compensation.

They should attain a balance in the relationship. They should avoid going to extremes. Neither breaking all the rules, nor following extreme and difficult restrictions in their dealings.

¹ Reported by al-Bukhari.

3. Meetings and gifts are encouraged

Conservative meetings between the engaged couple, in the presence of the girl's father, brother, uncle, or similar relative, can further mutual understanding, particularly in our modern societies in which cultures and sources are overlapping. On the other hand, gifts were generally encouraged by the Prophet (pbuh), who said, "Give presents to each other and love each other and enmity will disappear". No doubt, gifts from a fiancé to his bride, in particular, can generate affection between them.

Is affection allowed before marriage?

Mutual tendencies and desire for company, resort, and support between men and women are instinctive, and are regulated by Allah through marriage. Matrimonial motives vary, for they may be limited to wishing to marry a member of a decent family without previously knowing the wife, or they could be a result of respect and admiration. In rare cases, the motive might be based on a personal inclination and desire. Almighty Allah says,

[There is no blame on you if you make an offer of betrothal or hold it in your hearts. Allah knows that you cherish them in your hearts: But do not make a secret contract with them except in terms Honorable, nor resolve on the tie of marriage till the term prescribed is fulfilled. And know that Allah Knows what is in your hearts, and take heed of Him; and know that Allah is Oft-forgiving, Most Forbearing.]

(Al-Baqarah: 235)

This verse obviously shows how Allah gives consideration to human feelings of inclination towards the opposite sex.

With His Forgiveness and Mercy, Allah gives an opportunity for human feelings toward the opposite sex to be nourished even in the critical post-marital pause period. Indeed, it is a critical period, following the recent decease of the husband, yet Allah did not restrain the feelings of living men and women, i.e. the widows, but set certain restrictions in order to preserve the rights of the deceased without violating those of the living.

Affection towards a certain woman or man

Ibn `Abbas narrated that a man came to the Prophet (pbuh) and said, “We have an orphan girl and two men proposed to her, one is very poor and the other is well-to-do, and she likes the poor one while we prefer the well-to-do. So the Prophet (pbuh) said, “*Nothing was ever regarded as best for the lovers than marriage*”.¹

Should the marriage be rejected if emotions of love do not develop towards the fiancée?

Many girls perceive that the couple begins their married life with hearts that are filled with love and passion. A woman once came to `Umar ibn al-Khattab (may Allah be pleased with him) and complained of the sway of these emotions. He asked her about his manners; she answered positively. Then he asked her about his family and once again, her response was positive. So he responded, “*People live together by Islam, manners and blood relations.*” Therefore, one does not necessarily marry when his/her heart is full of love and

¹ Reported by Ibn Majah.

passion for one's mate, but rather, love between the couple grows gradually through living together.

Restrictions of the *Shari`ah* on premarital affection

Mutual affection between a man and a woman represents a human sentiment resulting from an innate property created by Allah in humans, namely the tendency towards the opposite sex upon reaching a certain level of mental and physical maturity. Such a tendency and its consequential affection is not a violation in essence, but the violation is related to the framework in which this tendency proceeds. For, there is a pure and permissible framework, as well as a forbidden framework. This means that affection is as noble as its purpose. If the purpose is for the couple to seek a lifelong partner and companion in each other through marriage, then this is truly noble. Thus, the religion was not meant to suppress human feelings, but rather to regulate them and direct them towards righteousness so that each person employs them for his own happiness and the happiness of others, not for his own misery and the misery of others.

Islam advises both spouses to avoid focusing on physical attraction during the pre-marital period. The engagement period is considered a chance for both partners to study the personality of each other since marriage is basically built on understanding and friendship. It is well-known that physical love is blind, so if one focuses on physical merits only, the defects of one's spouse after marriage may come as a shock. This could result in the collapse of the family. On the other hand, when every partner does his/her best in studying each other's personality, one will get acquainted with each other's defects and decide from the very beginning whether he/she can cope with it or not.

Both partners should get used to each other's company and learn how to deal with each other's problems. If they reach a point where they can share their problems and resolve them together, it will build a strong bond between them that will strengthen their relationship.

Period of engagement

Islam legislated marriage to take place in gradual steps to deepen and strengthen the emotional bonds and understanding between the couple.

It is noteworthy that Islam encourages expediting the making of marriage contracts and not extending the engagement period too much. The most important aspect is to attain the desired goal of the engagement which is rational understanding and emotional peace.

Rulings on Breaking up the Engagement

In Islam, no legal consequences result from breaking the engagement as long as no wedding contract has been made.

Jurisprudents' views regarding the engagement gifts

Regarding what the man gives to his fiancée of gifts or money as a dowry, jurisprudents have two opinions:

1. The *Fiqhi* schools of Hanafi, Hanbali and Shafi'i view that the gifts during the engagement period are but offerings and that the one who offers them can take back what he has offered, unless the gifts had been consumed or destroyed.
2. The Maliki *Fiqhi* School views that the gifts presented before marriage should be divided between both parties in case the engagement breaks.

It should be noted that the consensus of jurisprudents agree that the previous opinions should take place regardless of the reasons for breaking up.

Engagement Interview Questions

There are five integral elements that a mate should seek in his partner and they should be carefully measured:

1. Adherence to the religious rules and the righteous path.
2. Good Manners
3. Sound way of thinking
4. Proper scope for the future
5. Compatibility of traditions

These main five elements can be elaborated in the form of questions that the couple can exchange with each other – yet with observing the needed adjustments to suit the different situations and personalities.

The engagement interview questions:

1. **What is your goal in life?**

(This question measures intentions, visions and aspirations)

Everyone should have a main goal in life, which he seeks to accomplish. It can be social, religious, familial or scientific. The bottom line behind this is to clarify and get the goals and dreams of the couple closer together, especially at the beginning of the relationship so their vision for life would be similar. The similar and closer the couple's goals and visions are, the lesser marriage conflicts they might have in future.

2. What is your perspective towards marriage?

This question is highly important for the couple's better understanding. One of the wives said in this regard, "I was stunned when I knew that my husband views marriage as just an outlet for satisfying the sexual needs! While showing emotions of respect and appreciation are of no value to him. He threw all responsibilities on me."

A husband said, "How shocking it was to me to know that my wife sees marriage as just a way to give children! We are in continuous conflicts and we didn't have any children till now."

Hence, knowing the conception of marriage for each of the couple is among the aspects that maintains the family's future stability.

3. What are your future plans?

In other words, "what is the method you will follow in bringing up your children?"

4. What are the characteristics you seek in your partner, which you thought about before engagement?

This is meant to understand the view of your mate towards the opposite sex, and hence get a better picture of his/ her way of thinking.

5. What are the things you like and the things you dislike?

This question should be comprehensive and cover all areas. You should be so clear and open to each other like an open book, as if getting inside each other's mind. The things one like and hate cover the manners, behavior, attitude, food, hobbies...etc. so that each one could reach a decision of whether the other person suits him or not.

6. How does he/she look at the concept of being religious?

This means to ascertain the fact that being religious – in the view of the other partner – doesn't only apply to appearance, i.e. when did you get veiled, and why? Were there any obstacles...etc?

In addition, there is a very important issue: Keeping an eye on the dealings and morals – how does he/she treat his/her family and how the family treats him/her.

7. Do you believe it is important to give birth in the first year of marriage?

Some would consider this question unimportant, but, in fact, many marriages had been destroyed because of the conflict over this issue, especially at the beginning of marriage when the families start pressing on the married couple concerning the issue of having children. Therefore, the couple should discuss and agree on a similar view to this subject, to prevent it to become an issue in the future. Here we do not recommend giving birth to children at the first year of marriage or to delay it, but rather derive the attention to this point and leave the engaged couple to choose.

8. Do you have any health problems or physical inability?

There is no doubt that knowing the health problems, which the other mate has might affect the decision of proceeding with the marriage. If one of the couple hides from the other part a sickness or health problem that he/she has and did that intentionally, it is considered a cheating in the marriage contract. So this must be very clearly defined between the engaged couple, whether it is a prominent handicap, a skin

disease infecting the hidden parts of the body, or any other disease or flaw which the person intending to marry might be infected with.

9. Are you a socially interactive person? And who are your friends?

The social relation one has is among the important factors that distinguish the individual. It is important that the person be socially active and able to exchange cordial social care and love. It is also important to know his/her type of friends, degree of their closeness; whether he/she is a socially open and interactive person or rather prefers isolation and detachment. To ask if he/she has a faithful friend who is considered the friend of his/her life? If he/she does not have one, so the indications for his/her ability to have an everlasting relationship with a wife are very little since it is a sign of unfaithfulness.

- Did he/she ever offer a sacrifice expecting no return? (i.e. donations/ helping or serving orphans and the sick...etc.). He/she should be charitable and altruist.
- Ask him: if you differ in opinion with your friends, how do you deal with this? And what is your reaction? Do you force others to adopt your point of view, or you rather try to understand their point of view? (for a better married life).

10. How do you describe your relation with your parents, sisters, brothers, relatives?

Knowing the relation of the engaged mate with his/her parents and family is a highly important factor, because marriage is not a contract between the couple only but rather between their families as well. The husband will not live all his life separated from the wife's family and the same goes

for the wife also, but they will mingle together and the more the relation between the parents of each spouse with the other is good, the more their marriage will be blessed (God willing) and the happier the family will be.

11. How do you spend your leisure time? And what are your hobbies?

The more one gets a better understanding of the other person the easier the decision of marriage will be. Knowing what each one enjoys to do in his/her leisure time shows his/her real personality and can act as a measure for his/her ambitions, goals and the scope towards life.

12. Do you participate in any charity or voluntary activity?

The stronger the relation of the person with Allah is, the more trustworthy he/she becomes. Devoting some time for the charitable activities is considered among the factors that renew the vitality of the married life and strengthen the marital relationship between the couple – because through doing this, they would both live for one common goal: Seeking Allah's satisfaction.

13. What is your opinion if our mothers interfered with our personal lives?

This question should be addressed even between the individuals who are intending to get engaged since this point is very sensitive. They should agree that if their opinions are different regarding some matters, how should a third party (the mother or the father or even the grand mother) interfere in their private life? You can refer to the stories of successful marriages and benefit from their experiences.