

## CHAPTER FIFTEEN

### Arranged or forced marriages?

Many people cringe when they hear the words 'arranged marriage.' They cringe because it brings to mind an image of a forced union and an unhappy couple in the middle of it.

#### Arranged marriage

The Islamic way is to arrange a match between compatible partners. Muslims are not allowed to date or engage in pre-marital intimacy (including holding hands and kissing). Parents, relatives, elders and/or close and trusted friends will scout for prospective partners, check out their background and negotiate arrangements. Ideally, young people have the security of knowing that their parents or guardians have their best interests at heart and will find the right person for them. The burden is lifted from their shoulders, to some extent, and they know that they need not take numerous chances and risks in hopes of finding Mr. or Ms Right.

The main focus here is simply ensuring that the married couple will have the approval and blessings of both their parents. After all, the parents play the main role in the decision - they are the ones who research and check into the background of the person their child wishes to marry.

#### Forced marriages

Arranged, however, does not mean forced. The prospective partners, especially the girl, have the right to say 'No', and this is to be respected by the parents or guardians. It is her right to refuse. There are sound reports which the Prophet (may Allah bless him and grant him peace) annulled marriages in cases where a girl or woman had been forced to marry a partner she disliked.

Narrated Khansa' bint Khidam al-Ansariyyah, that her father gave her in marriage when she was a matron and she disliked the marriage. So she went to Allah's Messenger (may Allah bless him and grant him peace) and he declared that marriage invalid.<sup>i</sup>

Mughhirah Ibn Sha'bah (may Allah be pleased with him) said, "*I got engaged to a woman at the time of the Prophet (may Allah bless him and grant him peace). He asked me, 'Have you seen her?' I said, 'No.' he said, 'Go and have a look at her, because it is more fitting that love and compatibility be established between you.'*"<sup>ii</sup>

It is important that one should look at the partner whom one may marry as it helps to make the decision.

Abu Hurayrah (may Allah be pleased with him) reported that the Messenger of Allah (may Allah bless him and grant him peace) said; "*A previously-married woman must not be given in marriage without being consulted, and a virgin must not be given in marriage before her permission has been obtained.*" When asked was her permission indicated, he replied that it was by her saying nothing.<sup>iii</sup>

#### What about romance?

Many Westerners find this way of arranging marriages to be totally unromantic, and even rather odd. Muslims who are unduly influenced by movies and novels may also feel some kind of longing for "romance" – they forget that these works of fiction exaggerate, and are not representative of real life. The Islamic way certainly involves much businesslike talk and negotiation of conditions, and the prospective partners may "interview" one another – which makes it all seem more like a boardroom deal than the romance of the century. People who have over-indulged in Hollywood, Bollywood and Lollywood love stories may find it all quite weird, but surely it is better to "lay all the cards on the table" from the outset than to finding things out the hard way and having unpleasant surprises later on.

#### What about looks?

The Messenger of Allah (may Allah bless him and grant him peace) has reported, "*Do not marry women on the consideration of the beauty of their face and figure. It may be that their beauty may lead them to predication. Nor marry them for the sake of riches and wealth, as their property may make them headstrong and*

*disobedient. But marry them on the consideration of their piety. A jet black woman possessing good manners is better than a beautiful woman belonging to a good family who is ill mannered.”<sup>iv</sup>*

In an arranged marriage since the partner has been recommended by those who have made enquires, those involved believe that this partner is good for you. Not only that, but when we go to see the partner to be and we are actually sitting down and getting to know the person, we may develop a mutual bond. Remember, just because it is an arranged marriage, it doesn't mean that the couple have to be strangers to begin with. They may know each other from school, work, as peers, etc.

The Prophet (may Allah bless him and grant him peace) has said, “*A woman may be married for four things: for her wealth, for her noble descent, for her beauty or for her religion. Choose the one who is religious!*” This also applies to Muslim sisters looking to get married, it is essential that they also choose a husband who is religious.

So we find from the teachings of the Prophet (may Allah bless him and grant him peace) that marry someone because of their character because, beauty is not everlasting, as if one has an accident and damages the face then there is no love left in the marriage as if this was the reason for marriage then it is lost. To marry someone for wealth is not recommended as today you have it and tomorrow you may lose it. To marry someone with good character means that even if something goes wrong in the marriage then due to the person's good character it will be dealt with in the best way due to the person's nature and piety.

That's what makes an arranged marriage so beautiful. We stick with the person we chose from the start and as time goes on, we get to know them better and better.

The beauty of an arranged marriage is that the emphasis is on getting along, not evaluating one another on a scale of one to ten. It is a mature relationship from the outset.

So we find that there is a difference between arranged and forced marriages. Arranged marriages are encouraged in Islam and forced marriages are done by the ignorant and detested by Islam.

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<sup>i</sup> Sahih al-Bukhari.

<sup>ii</sup> Nisai

<sup>iii</sup> Bukhari & Muslim

<sup>iv</sup> Ibn Maja