

## Notes for premarital counselling:

The process should start with prayers. Introduction should be to introduce you to the couple and anyone else in the room. You may mention that the word Taqwa is mentioned 5 times in the Nikah Khutba, and the basis of marriage is Taqwa.

The interview should take about an hour or so, but not be overlong. The process should be made interesting, with interactions, not all didactic.

### Important note:

*the idea of counselling is not necessarily to teach religious beliefs, or to do tarbiyyat of the couple, or to improve spiritual status. The main idea is to make the couple aware of the common pitfalls that befall a marriage and lead to difficulties, and how best to avoid them. Increase in religious knowledge, and improving the level of tarbiyyat and spirituality will be a by product which it is hoped will happen (to a lesser or greater degree depending on the individuals).*

## Introduction:

Due to the increasing number of problems that are being encountered by married couples, it has been found necessary to make couples aware of the problems (that befall other couples). This meeting is for your information and to **forewarn** and **forearm** you.

**Before Marriage:** (surprising how many problems cause a marriage to break down before it starts)

*Beware of problems that begin before marriage that simmer and then present after marriage as huge boils that can disrupt or destroy a marriage.*

Marriage is between two people and two families. It may be easier to resolve issues between two individuals rather than between two families. Why? Because the family is made up of more than two individuals who have traditions, habits and practices that have been ingrained for years. Therefore, the couple will be well advised not confront either family head on. You will be making your own family, and your traditions. But before you do that, it is best to accept or tolerate the traditions, habits and practices of both families – unless they are clearly non Islamic.

**Hazrat Khalifatul Masih V ayyadahullahota'ala has instructed that the following be included in the counselling process:**

**IF A BOY OR GIRL DESIRES TO MARRY ANOTHER AHMADI PERSON BUT THE PRESENT MATCH IS BEING MADE BY FORCING OR COERCING THEM, THEN IT IS BEST FOR THE PARENTS NOT TO BE TOO OBSTRUCTIVE. IT IS BETTER THAT AFTER PRAYERS AND DOING OR GETTING ISTIKHARA DONE, THEY AGREE TO THE MATCH THAT IS IN ACCORDANCE WITH THEIR CHILD'S WISHES. (30th January 2015)**

## 1. Marriage Consent:

- a. Are both parties happy with the marriage?
- b. Has any party been forced to agree to this marriage against their will?
  - Is any party wishing to marry someone else or in love with someone else?

## 2. Haq meher:

- a. The Haq Meher is set so that it has to be paid to the wife by the husband.
- b. This is the girl's right from day 1 of marriage – cannot be denied except under special circumstances by the Qadha.
- c. May only be waived by the wife if done so completely voluntarily (without any instigation from the husband), and or if she has received it and then returns it.
- d. Has it been set to the satisfaction of both parties?
- e. Is the figure agreed by both sides (and no alteration was made at the time of signing of the nikah form by either side after a figure was agreed). If alteration was made, are both sides still happy?
- f. Haq meher that has been inflated for the purposes of prestige (with an assurance from the girl's side that it actually is never going to be claimed) is a 'NO! NO!'. A nikah must NEVER be announced on this basis.

## 3. Marital Home: In general, it is the girl who is married off in society, and it is the girl who therefore goes to live with her husband (and not the other way round. Exceptions do occur but that is by mutual agreement and understanding).

- a. Is it understood that the girl will live with the parents in the parental home – which will be the marital home? ***There must not be any ambiguity about this.***
- b. Is there any agreement or understanding that the period of living with parents will be for a specified period? If not, then it should be made clear at the outset whether the arrangement is long term or for a finite period. ***Both parties must not only be clear about this but accept the position.***
- c. Is there an agreement or understanding that the marital home will be separate from the parents? If so, what are the expectations about furnishing (or 'setting it' up)? It is generally expected for the girl's side to provide for the kitchen's set up like utensils, cutlery, cooking paraphernalia etc. The girl's side are also responsible for bedroom furnishings (as per the sunnah). The boy's side are responsible for the rest (i.e. sofa sets, chairs, other white goods etc). Any deviation from this must be completely voluntary from both sides, and no pressure should be applied on one side or the other against this. Does any side feel they have had any undue pressure exerted upon them? Are they comfortable about this now and accept it or would they like this resolved before the wedding proceeds?

## 4. Dowry: this is what the girl brings with her to the new home. When the Holy Prophet salAllahoalaihiwasallam married off his daughter Fatima (may Allah be pleased with her), the dowry given was kitchen utensils and bed furnishings). This establishes the broad parameters into which the dowry should fit.

- a. Has any side been pressurised subtly or openly about providing anything with which they are unhappy or easy about. Whatever is being offered in the dowry must be completely voluntary.

- b. Is the dowry being provided being done so in order to impress rather than to fulfil a requirement? Remember, blessing from Allah is best attracted when things are done with righteousness in mind.
- c. Is the dowry extra large or extravagant because there is a need to set up the couple? Are both sides happy and comfortable with this? Some marriages breakdown later, when the son in law feels that he was treated like a pauper, incapable of providing for his family.
- d. If the girl's side are unable to provide a dowry (as per sunnah) perhaps because of financial difficulties, or because coming from abroad, or other reasons, is this point understood and accepted by the boy's side? It will be unwise to proceed with the marriage if this will be a point of rancour later on.

#### **5. Expectation of duties from each other:**

- a. If a discussion between the two parties has already taken place about this, then it is good to hear about it. What is expected of the girl – household chores, cooking, keeping the house clean, etc. What is expected of the boy – going to work, helping with household chores, etc. Are both sides happy and comfortable with their expected roles? Are there any areas of potential conflict, e.g. expectation from the girl that she should cook for or do the washing or cleaning of ***the entire*** household whilst there are able bodied brothers or sisters in laws in the house. Expectation from the boy that he should take the wife on international holidays twice a year, etc.
- b. Does the girl know she will be expected to look after a sick parent – as a nurse perhaps? Does the son know that he will be expected to provide support for the girl's family if they are in distress or unexpected tragedy befalls upon them.

#### **6. Clarity about personal issues:**

- a. Are both sides aware of each other's personal issues relating to:
  - i. Health – Have both sides made each other aware of any long term health problems they have had or still have – such as a history of fits/epilepsy even though it may be fully controlled now, any chronic diseases such as diabetes, thyroid problems, depression, mental illnesses etc, etc. Any surgical operations in the past, any scars on the hidden from view normally, etc, etc. Do remember, marriages break down with great acrimony if such disclosures are not made candidly.
  - ii. Any previous marriages, wives (in case of men), children, engagements, etc
  - iii. Personal habits – such as smoking or taking intoxicants. Any history of alcohol or illicit drug use in the past. If one has had a history but is now clear of such vices, but a number of people have known this past history, then it's always advisable to be clear about this with your future partner before marriage. It will only end painfully if found later, as it will be a sure sign of lack of honesty.
- b. Employment – be truthful where you work and what you work.
- c. Girls desire to work
- d. Like or dislike of having children early or late
- e. Dislike or otherwise of in laws visiting regularly
- f. Dislike of being involved in jama'at work or otherwise, having expectations of that.
- g. Regularity in salat and attendance at jama'at meetings.
- h. Chanda payments and jama'at contributions.

7. **Marriage ceremony:**

- a. Some marriage rites and rituals are common to some families and frowned upon by others – such as giving of gifts to the entire household by one side or the other.
- b. Marriage functions such as the Rukhsati and Walima. Who gets invited and who not.
- c. Barat (wedding procession from the boy's side)

8. **Jewellery given at time of marriage:** jewellery at the time of marriage is normally considered part of the marriage contract, unless specifically stated otherwise. This should be understood clearly, for in the unfortunate case where a marriage breaks down, these items have to be returned. Once a marriage gets established, such jewellery becomes the asset of the wife to do what she may please with it.

9. **Gifts of marriage:** Gifts given at the time of marriage are gifts, and form part of the property and assets of the one who receives them. They can be disposed off in any way by the recipient (i.e. given away or kept). It is highly advisable however, that gifts provided by the in laws should be kept and used to demonstrate their value. If a dress or item of clothing provided by the mother in law is not to your taste, it still pays dividends to be seen wearing it for at least once. Also important and sensible is to wear garments provided as part of dowry or barri/warri to either partner to display to those who provided them. Do remember, it is not always possible for the other side to have known your tastes and preferences. They have tried their best, and not to appreciate that lands a bad impression from the start. Toughen your heart, clench your teeth, and show your appreciation by being seen to use their gifts.

10. **Honeymoon arrangements:**

- a. Has it been determined or is it a surprise? Not going away on honeymoon should not be the surprise. If cannot afford to go away, it should be so made clear at the outset, and there is no shame in that. Lack of clarity on such issues only helps to fuel disputes in future.
- b. If going abroad, are the passports and vaccinations etc current? Boy shouldn't expect the girl to have anticipated that if she didn't know the honeymoon was going to be abroad.

11. **Going to live with his parents:**

- a. First few days:
  - i. She is guest of the house and should be very well looked after.
  - ii. She should not be expected to be involved in any household chores.
  - iii. Everyone should be on their best behaviour welcoming her to the household.
  - iv. She has just left the cosy sanctity of her own house, and will have feelings of sadness, and may pine for her parents etc. This should be fully understood and sympathised with. Lack of understanding at this stage could mark out the in laws as being harsh, hard and without sympathy. Avoid this at all costs.
  - v. Household duties to be carried out should be told by the husband (and not anyone else, specifically the mother in law or the sisters in law). This should be done in the form of a discussion and when a light hearted conversation is going on (not in a tense authoritative manner). Do remember that this is

going to be a process of gradual assimilation in the family, not a forced induction.

- vi. Household duties should be allocated fairly so that all able household members participate in the upkeep of the house. The girl is not meant to come in as a servant.
- b. New practices and habits: both families are used to their own way of living and dealing with things. Be mindful of this and be respectful to each family's way of doing things if they are different from yours. Do not impose your ideas upon the other and do not joke about the practices and habits of the others. Show understanding and respect.
- c. New family dynamics: each family operates differently, mother in law may make all the decisions in one household, or the eldest son would, or the father in law does, etc. In addition, there may be differences in that certain types of decisions are taken by certain members of the family. Both sides are advised to learn about this in the early days, and then try to respect the family dynamics. Do not try to impose your own values – there will be enough time for that when you get established. This applies to both boy and girl.
- d. Family expectations:
  - i. For the bride to behave like a bride and the groom like a groom for the first few days. The girl should dress up properly and come down dressed in the mornings. The boy should behave as a son in law, showing respect to the in laws.
  - ii. Respect of the gifts that have been given to either side. It is good manners to be seen to appreciate the gifts provided from the other side. Wearing the jumper provided by the in laws, or the necklace from the in laws not only is good manners, but earns a lot of kudos.
  - iii. Daughter in law is expected to show respect and deference to the mother in law and the father in law. Son is expected to treat his mother and father in law with respect and as parents. Both are expected to show tolerance and respect to the siblings of their spouse.
- e. Family stresses:
  - i. Both sets of parents in laws will feel a sense of loss at some stage, for having to share their child with an outsider. This is understandable, and should be understood. Do not feel angry and disappointed when you see signs of this. Tolerate it. Best way to eventually make it go is to become part of the family – merge with the family. Important for both sides.
  - ii. Tensions usually mount with the sisters of the husband, as it is difficult to share a brother. Best way to deal with this is to ignore it as much as possible, and try to befriend them. Find things that are common between them and yourself and use them to befriend them.
- f. Expectations from each other:
  - i. Trust – a new partner in life. Be able to keep whatever secrets and personal details of each other CONFIDENTIAL. That means that your parents and siblings have been replaced in the hierarchy, and your partner is now your

first and foremost point of confidence. Remember that and do not breach this confidence and trust.

- ii. Respect – of what you do, like, dislike, enjoy, have an interest in, or prefer. Your tastes may be different from the partner so be understanding. You are two different individuals coming together. There will be time in future to merge your tastes and preferences together.
- iii. Understanding – understanding of the difficulties both parties are experiencing or will experience in trying to adjust to the new set of circumstances presented to by joining two different individuals together. Understanding means that you give each other leeway and time to adjust and change.
- iv. Tolerance – of the mistakes or difficulties each side experiences whilst trying to adjust to each other. Some issues may just be very difficult to overcome. It may be difficult or impossible for one not to snore, or not to perspire excessively, or to stop laughing in a certain way, etc, etc. Be tolerant and show understanding. There may be difficulties in adjusting to dietary changes, not liking something cooked in certain ways, etc. Tolerance and understanding is needed here, rather than feeling slighted and blaming the partner for not respecting the culinary skills of the in laws.
- v. Husband and wife relationship: issues of this nature should best be discussed between the couple themselves. Involving outsiders is best avoided for the first few weeks. The couple should try to work things out between themselves and give each other due consideration for their inexperience.
- vi. Time together: in the early days of marriage, it is expected that the couple will and should spend most of their time together. Going about their normal business as if nothing has happened is building a poor foundation for the future. However, whilst being together mostly, obligations to the rest of the family must not be forgotten.
  - 1. It is still important for one partner to let go of the other so that they may fulfil their obligations to their parents or siblings – such as meeting and greeting them in the mornings and or having a meal with them if that is the norm.
  - 2. Remembering to meet and enquire after other members of the family, so that they do not feel ignored.
  - 3. Ringing back home and enquiring about one's parents and letting them know how things are proceeding, etc.
  - 4. Being allowed to contact friends and update them. Be mindful that the relationship priorities are now changed, and the partner is now the priority. So time allocation to friends will necessarily have to be reduced, even though complete cut off is not being suggested.
- g. After the first few days: when the euphoria of marriage settles, you begin to see the partner and their families differently. Things which you may have ignored before may become significant now. Remember: this is your new life, and this is what you have to compromise with. You give up something and the other side gives up

something and together, you reach a middle road. The difficulties if any, have to be tackled with:

- i.* Taqwa foremost in mind – that is, will Allah be happy or unhappy if this issue is brought to the fore.
- ii.* Issues with partner: these are best discussed mutually with understanding, tolerance and forbearance.
- iii.* Issues with family: also best discussed mutually with your partner with understanding, tolerance and forbearance. **It is best not to involve your families as they will provide solutions best suited to their point of view, whereas you are a new family and will develop your own values and views as a result of your combined attitudes and preferences. Interference from families is a frequent cause of marriage breakdowns.**
- iv.* Arguments: these will develop for sure, sometimes frequently. The most important thing is to:
  1. Avoid talking when the other is angry or answering back
  2. Avoid using bad language at all costs
  3. Never bring the other's family into the argument (i.e. your parents or other family members are like this also, etc, etc).
  4. Never become violent (i.e. throw things, or punch or slap). **The surest way of losing respect is to display violence of any kind.**
  5. Always end an argument as soon as you can. This can be done by either apologising (even if you are wrong and the other is too proud to accept it – you can correct them later when they are in a better mood), or by not responding to the arguments (you can only clap with both hands).
  6. Never ever go to bed with the argument unresolved.
- v.* If arguments get persistent: sometimes this will happen in some cases. Sensible senior family members can help, if they don't take sides. Sometimes junior family members close to your partner provide help and resolution. If it does not seem to be working, then it is better to involve outsiders confidentially. It will be important to contact the Islahi Committee or the counsellor/advisor of the area. **Do not ever forget the power of prayers. (rabbana hub lana min azwajina.....). Requesting Huoor ayyadahullahota'ala and other righteous people regularly (and in confidence) for prayers is essential and very rewarding.**
- h.* Family secrets: both partners are entrusted with whatever happens in their new families. Don't breach that trust. Don't tell outsiders about what happens in the families. Most of, don't tell about what you see as failings in them.

## 12. Beware:

- a. Of other relatives who seek to know about how things are going on but are more interested in getting juicy gossip rather than offer genuine help.
- b. Of friends who offer a shoulder to lean on should you need one but may not keep your confidence – supposedly in your interest.
- c. People who enquire about your new family from you, hoping to find areas of criticism.

**13. Going to live alone with your partner:** be prepared for life which will be markedly different from what you are used to.

- a. Make sure you construct a normal household routine which should be followed:
  - i.* Ensure you get up together and have breakfast together. Do not let him prepare and have his breakfast alone whilst you lie in bed asleep.
  - ii.* If you have both agreed to this, then ensure his clothes are ready BEFORE it is time to go for work.
  - iii.* If packed lunch needs to be prepared, ensure its ready the night before, or well before departure time from home.
  - iv.* Ensure that the evening meal (or lunch if he comes home for it) is ready in time. Try to make things that he likes.
  - v.* Go through the routine of the day, vacuuming cleaning where necessary, cooking and washing up etc, etc.
  - vi.* Make sure that you are ready and properly dressed when he comes home. To many, nothing is more off putting than to come home to the lady of the house who is still in her night gown.
- b. When husband has gone away to work, it will suddenly be very lonely, and depression can set in. You must avoid:
  - i.* Brooding on your own
  - ii.* Spending too much time on the internet or on the phone.
  - iii.* Sleep excessively and neglect yourself and your house.
- c. During loneliness, you need to occupy your time:
  - i.* Make a schedule of work around the house, which should start and finish on time.
  - ii.* Make yourself busy doing things which are or will be useful in future (like taking up a course of study).
  - iii.* Make friends with people you know your husband will approve – never with those you are sure he will disapprove. This applies both ways and you owe it to each other.
  - iv.* Ring both sides of the family from time to time to inform them of your and his wellbeing and seeking their best wishes.
  - v.* Busy yourself in improving your religious knowledge, by reading the books of the Promised Messiah alaihissalam. This is in anticipation of you setting a good example to your children in the future.
- d. Be in frequent contact with both sets of parents. Encourage each other to do so. It reassures everyone.

**14. Finances:** during breakdowns in marriage, financial issues figure fairly prominently. It is wise to ensure that this aspect is handled and dealt with fairly and sensitively and equitably.

- a. ***Disposal of household income.*** Are both sides clear that money is disposed off to their satisfaction? Sometimes the man may have committed to supporting relatives financially, and this should be clearly understood. It is not the lady's calling to support her side of the family from the man's income (over which he will have greater say and control). If there is a substantial portion of the boy's income that is going outside the use of the married couple and the household budget then it is important to disclose this at the outset.



- b. Agree how the household should be run. Who is responsible for the purchase of the day to day running of the household? Normally this falls in the realm of the lady of the house, but there is no hard and fast rule about this. Whatever is agreed, both sides should be happy and comfortable with this.
  - c. If the lady of the house is going to manage the house finances, it is important you agree what is a fair sum of money to be provided every week or month to ensure this task is carried out. There should always be provision for this to be reviewed at intervals to ensure the figure is reasonable.
  - d. Agree what exactly will be the responsibility of each partner for the running of the house. Who will pay the utility bills, the mobile phone bills, the internet bills, fuel for the car, insurance, etc, etc.
  - e. The wife must be provided with a reasonable amount of pocket money for personal use over and above household expenses. This may not be necessary if she has her own job as well. Division of duties of the household will then be by mutual agreement.
- 15. Inviting people:** neither party should invite people to the house without letting the other know in advance (exceptions accepted). Neither party should invite people the other is uncomfortable with unless it is those for whom Allah has enshrined a right in Islam (parents and blood relations).
- 16. Visiting relatives:** it is good practice to visit both sets of parents regularly. Both have rights and it is important for the confidence of each other that these rights are maintained and upheld.
- 17. Holidays:** marriage is expensive, and it is perhaps unfair to expect a holiday in the first year. However, this is not a hard and fast rule. Look at the finances of the house before demanding or expecting a holiday. Also look at what is affordable and reasonable. A good holiday brings the couple together and rejuvenates them. A holiday taken under pressure does no body any good.
- 18. Children:** the decision about when to have children must be mutual. There should be no pressure exerted by either set of parents in law, though it is acceptable to express a desire. If there is disagreement about when to have children, this should not be made into an issue in the first year or two of marriage. There may be difficulty in having children. This could be due to medical problems from both sides. Medically speaking, causes of infertility are equally distributed between the sexes, so it is not fair to blame one partner or the other. Medical help should be sought if there has been no pregnancy after ONE year of trying and both partners should seek advice together.
- 19. Money and assets:** it must not be forgotten that in Islam, what a man earns is common to husband and wife, but what a wife earns belongs to her for use as she chooses. Wives' income should not be eyed upon by the husband in anticipation for a share. Nor should they be coerced and or cajoled into giving you their income. Husbands who try to hold back household expenses in the belief that the wife should contribute, do wrong. Any contributions from the wife must be given completely voluntarily and happily.

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