

Choosing a Spouse

Although Allah has granted freewill to human beings, in fact we have very little freewill in our lives. We cannot choose our parents or families; we cannot choose our physical characteristics or genetic make-up, we cannot choose our brothers and sisters, or our children. If we do not like these relatives of ours, we are stuck with them.

However, there is one person we can choose – and although not a relative to start with, that person becomes our closest relative and our nearest neighbour - **we can choose with whom we will share our lives and our physical moments of intimacy.**

Therefore this choice is vitally important. If a woman is going to accept a man as the head of her own household, carry out his wishes, keep him healthy, fed and clean, and bear children to him – then it is **vital that she chooses someone she is able to respect**, someone who will be ‘up to the job’.

Men need to be respected, and women need to be loved. It is vital, therefore, that Muslims use their freewill sensibly. It is pointless for a woman to choose a handsome free-spending man full of flattery. Try to see him ten years down the line at the parents’ evening. Will he simply prove vain, a spendthrift, a charming liar? It is pointless for a man to choose a woman for her pretty face and sweet helpless nature and innocent chatter. Try to see her ten years down the line – will she have driven him mad with endless wittering, her prettiness have concealed a spoiled nature, her insecurity make her clinging and demanding?

This is where the business of the wali comes in.

The Function of the Wali

A *wali* is a person trusted by the bride (or it could be the groom also) to find out all the things it is prudent to know about the intended husband (or wife) – his character, his tendencies, his likes and dislikes, his faults and shortcomings (both physical and mental and social), his financial position, what his parents are like, what family commitments he already has, his mode of employment and prospects – in fact anything that it would be sensible to know in advance of the marriage.

The *wali* should be **careful to check everything out honestly and prudently.** Sometimes, when a young man is given a glowing reference by his family, it may conceal their heartfelt desire to ‘get rid of him’, or see him ‘settled’ comfortably.

Your parents are not necessarily the best wali for you – they may have vested interests which may or may not be to your advantage. They may feel they are obliged to organise your marriage to a cousin or other family member because of some ancient arrangement, or past debt. Remember that forced and false marriages are invalid both in UK and *Shari’ah* law – they can be made null and void.

In cases where the young couple are content to accept the choices of their parents, and have not seen the intended partner, they are nevertheless allowed to have a

clear idea of what the intended spouse looks like physically – as regards height, weight, facial beauty, hair colouring, and so on. Honest photographs are very useful. The Prophet disapproved of people being married without having not only seen each other, but seen each other enough that they might genuinely feel attracted to them, and come to see ‘why it is they would wish to marry’.

Suppose you see someone and fall in love? Be very careful – **love is a strong intoxicant and it can easily cloud the mind and upset rational judgement.** Love is ‘blind’ – it only sees what it wants to see. If the intended spouse has ‘faults’, you may think you will be able to ‘love’ them into giving them up and changing. Be warned – **faults only get worse after marriage**, not better. Make sure that you really do **like** the person you intend to marry, and not just feel ‘in love’ with them.

Muslims are reminded, of course, that **beauty is only skin-deep, and can change very rapidly** – after childbirth, a few years’ comfortable living, accidents, illness, and so on. Muslims should never marry simply because of attraction to the other’s beauty, but **marry for their ‘piety’ – the beauty of their characters.**

Miscellaneous things you might like to know before committing to a marriage

- Is he/she a smoker?
- Is he/she a studious academic, always ‘with a nose in a book’, boring, not quite ‘in this world’?
- Does he/she prefer excitement or peace and quiet?
- Does he/she like lots of visitors, or finds that a burden?
- Does he/she expect to live with the in-laws; expect you to look after her parents, or have them to live with you?
- Is he/she tidy or untidy? Lazy? Bone idle? Never picks things up, puts things away, never shuts cupboard doors, etc?
- Is he/ she nosy, interfering, gossipy?
- Is he/ she domineering, nagging, picky, tyrannical
- Is he/she over-house proud?
- Does he/she care enough for their appearance; or care too much/ always in front of a mirror/stuck in the bathroom?
- Does he/she have too many demanding friends; have no friends at all and if so, why; always want friends in when you wish to be alone or just with the family?

- Is he/she nicely fit, an athletics and sports freak, a complete slob?
- Is he/she capable of doing the things you expect a spouse to do – gardening, home maintenance, cookery, etc?
- Does he/she have a 'dream ideal', that he/she may try to turn you into?
- Is he/she mean or generous?
- Is he/she a spendthrift, or a liar, or thinks nothing of cheating in business, a bully?
- Do other people actually **like** your intended spouse, and if not, why not?
- Does he/she have a sense of humour? A cruel and malicious sense of humour?
- Will he/she boost your self-confidence, or make you feel inadequate?
- Is he/she a religious fanatic, spends most of the time at the mosque, prays forever and ignores you and everything else?
- Is he/she a ritually meticulous type, or takes a more general, relaxed view?
- Is he/she a faultfinder or a fault-coverer?
- Can you live with each other's politics?
- Is he/she a hypocrite? Does Islam stop at his/her neck, or go down into his/her heart?
- Is he/she boastful, arrogant, loud-mouthed, or modest and humble? Or too self-deprecating? Or irritatingly lacking in confidence?
- Would he/she respect your privacy – not read your diary, not open your letters, not open your handbag, or go through your pockets – without just cause?