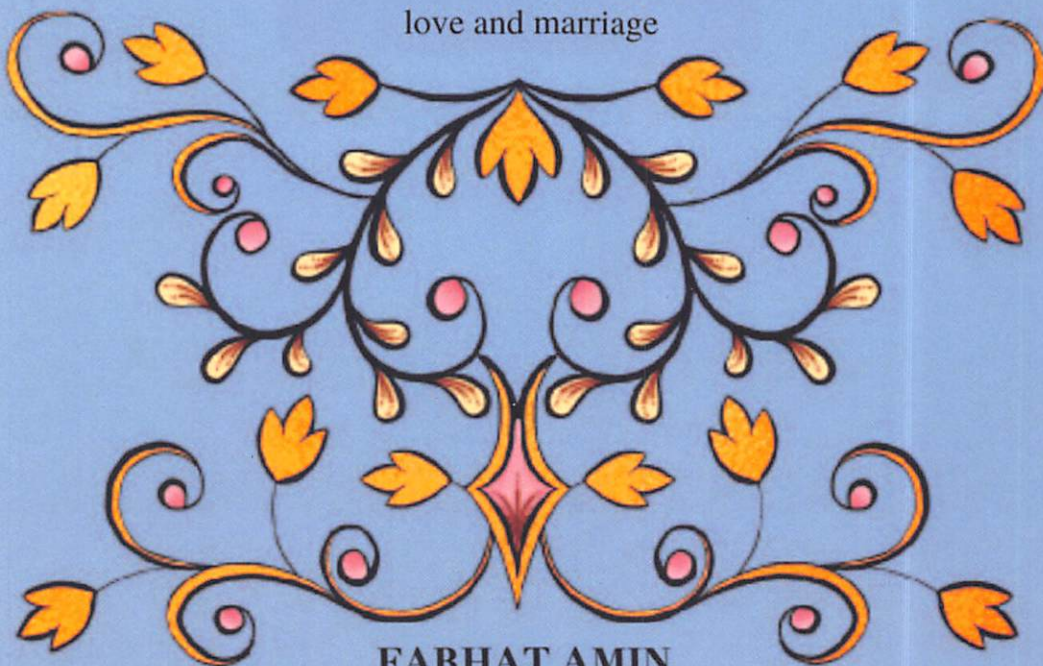


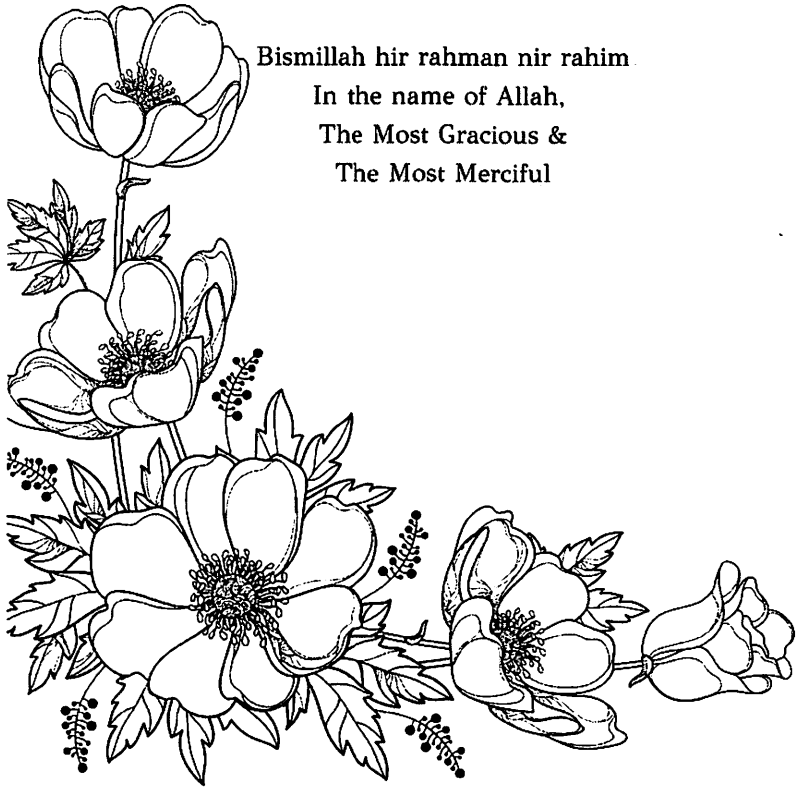


SMART SINGLE MUSLIMAH

Transform how you approach
love and marriage



FARHAT AMIN



Bismillah hir rahman nir rahim
In the name of Allah,
The Most Gracious &
The Most Merciful

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*The Prophet (saw) said,
"When a person gets married,
he has completed half of his religion,
so let him fear Allah with regard to the other half."*

(Bayhaqi)

INTRODUCTION

The word 'single' sounds so delicious, the connotations so desirable: carefree, spontaneous, independent. In truth, there is a kind of increasing self-aggrandisement surrounding the idea of identifying as single. It's a social marker that puts you in the in-crowd.

Singledom certainly has its charms and undoubtedly offers opportunities to take charge of your life and be highly productive. A particular hadith of the Prophet (saw) comes to mind when reflecting on a single life's many bounties. He (saw) advises:

"Take benefit of five before five: Your youth before your old age, your health before your sickness, your wealth before your poverty, your free time before you are preoccupied, and your life before your death" (Narrated by Ibn Abbas and reported by Al Hakim).

When you're young and single, you have fewer responsibilities. You can focus on studying, improving your character, and utilising your talents in the path of Allah. The Prophet (saw) told us that "A young person who grew up with the worship of Allah will be

among the seven who are granted shade by Allah when there is no shade but His." (Bukhari)

But, let's be honest. There comes the point where the novelty of being able to get out of any side of the bed begins to wear off. A little voice inside, you says: "Wouldn't it be nice to share my life with someone, a companion, my own, personal fajr alarm?" Don't rush to silence that voice. Trust it because it was put inside you when you were created by Allah. You have been hardwired to seek a deeper emotional and physical relationship with another person. However, this is a particular type of relationship, and it is vastly different from the relationship you have with your parents, siblings, and friends. This is the relationship between a husband and wife.

This is the first premise of my book. A *Smart Single Muslimah* doesn't ignore her feelings. She acknowledges that her Creator put them inside her. Most importantly, she chooses to fulfil her desires by following her Creator's guidance. Unfortunately, we live in a time where the Islamic concept of marriage is being taken off the menu. Marriage is simply not fashionable.

What does this mean? Western culture is built around ideals of individual choice and freedom. The right to "live life on one's own

terms" is a notion that is fiercely defended. However, we sometimes fail to recognise that these terms are cemented in ideologies that contradict our core Islamic beliefs.

For example, from a liberal perspective, singledom is freedom. It's your time to sparkle, experiment, and enjoy yourself. The only caveat is that you don't harm anyone else. Since the sexual revolution of the 1960s, the message has been loud and clear: sex, drugs, and rock and roll are all the rage. With the advent of the pill and legalised abortion, women could be as equally promiscuous as men, so the institution of marriage gradually eroded. "In 2009, for the first time in history, there were more unmarried women in the United States than married ones." (theamericanconservative.com) As Muslims, we are not immune to the effects of these trends, and trying to stay afloat in such trying times is becoming increasingly difficult.

It's peculiar how society teaches single people to desire sex without commitment. However, are you genuinely content living in this hyper sexualised and carefree "paradise"? As believers, we are ever mindful of Allah, and insightfully, The Messenger of Allah (saw) said, "The world is a prison for the believer and a paradise for the unbeliever." (Muslim)

In modern western societies, unmarried people can legally have sex, live together, raise children, buy property and do almost everything else associated with a committed relationship. So why do they need to marry at all?

Adding to the hoary anti-marriage clamour, we have feminists comparing traditional marriage to 'legalised prostitution and the family home to a 'comfortable concentration camp.' Typical feminists' slogans that discourage marriage sound like this:

"Don't accept traditional gender roles!"

"Don't sacrifice your career for marriage."

"You don't need a husband. Just become the man you want to marry."

Capitalism also undervalues motherhood. After all, it's unpaid, nontaxable labour. You're not contributing financially to your society when you stay at home and take care of your family. Hence, any job is better than being a wife. The broader culture knows what it believes, and it preaches it confidently.

Feminism hijacks the way we perceive our choices and replaces them with new ones. But the closer we pay attention to the liberal options we are given, the more we'll notice they don't align with our deen. This is the second premise of my book. A *Smart Single*

Muslimah doesn't blindly surrender to the choices that disagree with her fitrah.

Unfortunately, when we look at the state of (some, not all) arranged Muslim marriages, they are not glowing adverts for marital bliss. Stories related by unhappy wives are filled with too much detail of sadness to be invented or ignored. Scarred mothers tell their daughters to "learn from their mistakes, get an education and career so that there are options to escape a bad marriage." However, it is up to us to question whether these marriages were aligned with the Prophet's Sunnah (saw).

Abu Hurairah reported: The Messenger of Allah (saw) said, "The most complete of believers in faith are those with the best character, and the best of you are the best in behaviour to their women." (Tirmidhi)

Aisha reported: The Messenger of Allah (saw), said, "The best of you are the best to their families, and I am the best to my family..." (Tirmidhi)

Let's say you decide to pursue your education and career: a right that Allah has given. The dilemma you face is that you're following these ambitions in a capitalist economic system, a system that views marriage and family as an inconvenient interruption to

worker productivity. It encourages both husband and wife to work full time. Once children come along, you're told to hand them over to strangers in daycare so you can continue working. Why are we accepting that as the blueprint for our lives?

I realised how pervasive and global this problem was while undertaking research for my podcast, Smart Muslima, and this book. I've spoken to several women who followed a career path and completed their education before considering marriage. But they have hit a brick wall: they can't find a compatible Muslim man who fits their criteria of a suitable husband. Naturally, men also have their own standards, and it seems like both genders are looking at different checklists.

So we have the elephant in the room, and very few Muslims want to talk about it. A growing number of single Muslimahs are finding it difficult to get married. They are unhappy with the confusing expectations dictated to them by western liberals and unislamic eastern culture. For some, a consuming sense of hopelessness overcomes them as they face the real possibility of never getting married. This is a problem that we can't ignore because marriage and family are the twin foundations upon which healthy Muslim communities are built.

Rather than blame men or women for this situation, I want to offer a new perspective. First, I want to invite us to look at the ideas driving our actions and create this problematic situation. We collectively suffer because we have adopted ideas about love, marriage, and relationships that are alien to Islam. Individualism, sexism, racism and feminism are the main culprits. Secondly, what tools exist in our Quran and Sunnah that help us deal with the feeling of hopelessness?

As for the feminists, I want to invite them to consider whether the cause of all this unhappiness might be something other than the patriarchy. The feminist solution is too simplistic: women need unconditional equality. What has this didactic mantra given women in the West? Legitimised pornography, abortion on demand, one-night stands, Tinder, LGBTQI, etc. Should we also embrace this hedonistic lifestyle? Should we continue suffering from a poverty of ambition and just create another "Muslim Tinder" app, or is there a better alternative?

This brings me to the final premise of my book. I want to help you transform how you approach love and marriage. I want to help you become a *Smart Single Muslimah!*

A Smart Single Muslimah understands that if she wants to find a compatible man she can marry and develop intimacy with, she must stop trying to control relationships. She cannot decide who proposes to her, or if she's attracted to a man and proposes, she can't compel him to say yes! You may have unintentionally tried to manipulate and contrive relationships in the past, but you will no longer play those mind games.

A Smart Single Muslimah doesn't believe she will find the man of her dreams' scrolling Muslim Twitter. She's no longer hunting for 'Mr. Right'. Nor is she waiting for her "Ertugul" (or Turgut) to sweep her off her feet. But at the same time, she doesn't have to settle for just "anyone." She minimises her utopian list of characteristics she thinks are essential in a husband, and she acknowledges that she can be content and happy with a normal imperfect Muslim man.

Throughout the book, you will find examples to help illustrate the points I am making. Some of the chapters are written by Muslim women based on their experiences, their name, and other identifying information has been changed.

This book is not intended to be a book of fiqh or legal rulings; however, it is grounded in the teachings of the Quran and the Sun-

nah. There are many excellent Islamic resources that explain in detail the rights and responsibilities of a husband and wife. I definitely urge you to spend time doing more research to help you understand precisely what an Islamic marriage is. This book is mainly meant to address contemporary issues faced by single Muslimahs living in the West.

The Quran's references are provided in the following format: (5:2) refers to the second verse in chapter 5 of the Quran. References to hadith indicate the collection of hadith (Muslim, Bukhari, Tirmidhi, etc.)

Adopting a smart Islamic approach to relationships is about following some simple prophetic principles that will help you change your habits and attitudes about getting married. Shifting your mindset is daunting, as you are setting sail on uncharted waters. Inshallah, you will find a compatible husband who will complement you, not complete you. My sincere wish is for you to no longer be confused or be consumed by feelings of hopelessness. Inshallah, you will soon find the peace of mind you crave. May Allah grant you a successful marriage with a spouse who will be the coolness of your eyes, Ameen.

Let's remember each other in our duas

Your sister Farhat Amin

P.S. On my website www.smartmuslima.com I have a pre-marriage course which has helped many women inshallah you may want to take a look.

IS MARRIAGE GOING OUT OF FASHION?

A modern-day truth universally acknowledged is that a single woman in possession of a good fortune is in no need of a husband. When it comes to love and relationships, marriage is seen as outdated. Women have the right to be as sexually promiscuous as men. After all, we have equal agency. Biology need not get in the way of that freedom, so birth control, abortion, and same-sex relationships are encouraged and promoted as part of the 'do whatever feels right for you' rhetoric. No one has the authority to tell you who you can go out with, sleep with, or marry. Anyone who challenges this thinking is branded a sexist.

Growing up, we were drip-fed a 'do what makes you happy' mantra about relationships. Most books, music, TV shows, and movies we consume condition us to think about finding love in a certain way. Sociocultural norms tell us we should meet someone by getting to know them through dates, texting, and flirting. Only

after we spend a good few years establishing a relationship do we contemplate the next step of marriage. For some, marriage never even enters the picture, as they believe the non-committal relationship simply works for them. But how is this recipe for romance working out for women?

In 1999, Wendy Shalit wrote a controversial cultural essay, sharply critiquing the dating scene of modern liberal America as mentally and physically damaging to women. Shalit observes:

"Today, men expect to be able to treat single women like prostitutes, only without just compensation, and the virgins are the ones who are now stigmatised." *A Return to Modesty: Discovering the Lost Virtue.*

Shalit's motivation for writing the book was her genuine concern for young women who have been duped into thinking they have no option than to sign up to the sexualised dating game:

"Ours is supposed to be a time of great freedom. And yet most people have ended up letting the culture they live in dictate their choices." Her observation is reminiscent of the wise words of Umar bin Al Khattab, "He who does not live in the way of his beliefs starts to believe in the way he lives." I have to agree with both of them. I know all too well the impact that romcoms and Bolly-

wood movies have on our perception of love. However, rather than passively consuming the liberal narrative, shouldn't we challenge it?

Few female voices are willing to critique the idea peddled by progressives: that the sexual revolution empowered women. Shalit, however, challenges this narrative: "there was a certain misogyny behind the sexual revolution. Yes, dear, you can be a b*tch, you can be a sl*t, you can sleep around as much as you want, and you can pretend to be a man, but you're not allowed to be this (modest)." We should take a leaf out of Shalit's book and think outside the box. She has a keen sense of the fault lines in such arguments.

Single women have lost their dignity, their "feminine mystique." Mothers tell their daughters they shouldn't want to give up all the hard-won "gains" acquired during the sexual revolution. What gains? Sexual harassment, date rape, stalking, eating disorders, and empty hook-ups? Or perhaps it's the great gain of divorce?

Who can deny that our societies, Muslim and non-Muslim, have become less civilised? Globally, the sexual revolution gave women more control and choice. Still, it also ushered in the normalisation

of pornography, strip clubs, increased public immodesty, and an acceptance of relationships outside of marriage.

Interestingly, marriage continues to be one of the most resilient institutions found in virtually every society. The union of a man and a woman, recognised by religion or state authority, is as old as civilisation itself. But in the West, two dystopian trends are occurring. Firstly, the concept of what constitutes a marriage is being reimagined, and secondly, some want to consign it to the dustbin of history altogether.

Over time, the institution of marriage has morphed and evolved, breaking away from its religious roots. People are creating their own rules and building their marriages based on the ideals of individualism and equality. This has given rise to the "self-expressive marriage." Singles now increasingly look to marriage for self-discovery and personal growth. Marriage is no longer primarily about raising a family. Now, love and marriage are about individual fulfilment. Young people today see no connection between love, family, and a greater purpose.

The history of marriage in the West is a history of change. The idea that a marriage should be between a man and a woman, each

having clear roles and responsibilities defined by God's guidance, is fast becoming extinct.

This traditional vision of marriage is now perceived as backward and archaic. Historically in the West, ideas about marriage were dictated by the Bible. But as we know, the authors of the Bible were men, not God. Therefore, their religious doctrine includes derogatory views about women that were held by men at the time. Additionally, the hypersexualisation of Western society is mainly reactionary to the historic anti-sex perspectives of Christianity.

Misogyny is ingrained in the Old Testament. One only needs to read the story of Adam and Eve (peace be upon them). When God asked Adam why he ate from the forbidden tree, he answered, according to the Old Testament:

"And the man said, The woman whom thou gavest to be with me, she gave me of the tree, and I did eat. And the Lord God said unto the woman, What is this that thou hast done? And the woman said, The serpent beguiled me, and I did eat." (Genesis 3:12-13)

In stark contrast, in the Quran, Allah clearly informs us that both Adam and Eve (peace be upon them) were deceived by Satan, sinned, and were later forgiven. There is no blame upon Eve as the

individual who was first tempted by Satan, nor is there the concept of original sin in Islam.

"We cautioned, "O Adam! Live with your wife in paradise and eat as freely as you please, but do not approach this tree, or else you will be wrongdoers. But Satan deceived them—leading to their fall from the 'blissful' state they were in, and We said, "Descend from the heavens 'to the earth' as enemies to each other (i.e., humans and Satan). You will find in the earth a residence and provision for your appointed stay." (2:35-36)

Volumes have already been written by Muslims refuting the myth that Eve (and, by extension, all women) should be blamed for mankind's expulsion from heaven. This misogynistic narrative only serves in dehumanising women and pushing them further away from religion. So, it's understandable why women in the West dislike the institution of marriage based on biblical teachings. Christianity has oppressed women for centuries, even going as far as to question whether women have souls and burning them at the stake for being witches!

Mary Wollstonecraft famously compared marriage to "little more than a state of legal prostitution" (*A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, 1792). When we study the laws pertaining to women in

the 18th century, they were indeed oppressive. For example, a woman lost her legal identity upon marriage. In England, the principle of coverture recognised a woman according to her marital status. This legal concept began in the 12th century until the late 19th century. William Blackstone, an 18th-century English judge, explains coverture:

"By marriage, the husband and wife are one person in law: that is, the very being or legal existence of the woman is suspended during the marriage, or at least incorporated and consolidated into that of the husband: under whose wing, protection, and cover, she performs everything..." Commentaries on the Laws of England (Vol. 1, 1765, pages 442-445)

A wife did not have control over her property, and her husband could use her property without her permission unless otherwise stated before the union. In Britain, this continued until the Married Women's Property Act of 1870, which changed the law so that a wife could own, buy, and sell a property.

Examples such as these give credibility to radical feminist, Julie Bindel's statement, who said, "The institution of marriage curtailed women's freedom for centuries" (www.guardian.com/uk). Divorce was not legal under English law until the Matrimonial Causes Act

of 1857. Before 1857, a form of legal separation could be achieved only through a convoluted annulment process or through the passing of a Private Act of Parliament. These measures were expensive, so only wealthy women could afford legal separation.

As Muslims, we have to understand that this is not our experience. Many women in the West have had a disappointing experience with marriage which was justified by religion. As a result, they are now rejecting a traditional "European-Christian" version of marriage. But we shouldn't adopt their grievances and superimpose them on our lives. Liberal fanatics lazily lump all religions together and proselytise that religion is antithetical to women's freedom and equality. Therefore, an Islamic marriage means only one thing for women: subjugation. For example, Simone de Beauvoir, makes an impressive counterfactual manoeuvre when describing Islam in her book:

"For the Jews, Mohammedans, and Christians, among others, men are master by divine right; the fear of God will therefore repress any impulse towards revolt in the downtrodden female." (The Second Sex)

If she had studied Islam in earnest, she would acknowledge that Allah has given men and women different roles and responsibili-

ties, but both must be equal in obeying Allah. No human being is given license in Islam to oppress another human being. But it seems that feminism isn't interested in the truth or religious nuances, and French feminists in particular harbour an irrational hatred for Islam.

In fact, de Beauvoir says that women who accept their roles as mothers benefit religious institutions by keeping power inequalities intact. With the help of popular culture, feminists have made women instinctively feel outraged at the idea of taking care of their home and family. Simone de Beauvoir denigrates housewives by labelling them as: "A parasite sucking out the living strength of another organism...the (housewife's) labour does not even tend toward the creation of anything durable....Woman's work within the home (is) not directly useful to society, produces nothing." (The Second Sex). De Beauvoir believed women should not be allowed to become housewives because if the choice was available, "too many women will make that one."

Famously, in the 1970s, Betty Friedan wrote: "Housewives are mindless and thing-hungry...Housework is peculiarly suited to the capabilities of feeble-minded girls; it can hardly use the abilities of

a woman of average or normal human intelligence." (The Feminine Mystique)

More recently, we have Linda Hirshman chastising women who quit work to stay at home, saying, "their talent and education are lost from the public world to the private world of laundry and kissing boo-boos." (Get to Work). She believes these women "aren't using their capacities fully; their so-called free choice makes them unfree dependents on their husbands."

The message that single Muslim women are hearing is loud and clear. If you want to get married, that's your choice, but do it on your own terms and eschew Islamic traditions because religion is patriarchal. They are persuading us that their social practices, such as dating culture, are superior, and our marriage-centred faith is backward. To become civilised, we need to imitate them. This is a continuation of the colonialist narrative that was cultivated when they occupied our lands. Popular culture continually reinforces this negative propaganda about the Islamic view of love, marriage, and family i.e., Aladdin, Hala, A Thousand Splendid Suns, Cuties, etc.

This is an overlooked aspect of the islamophobic society we are living in. We recognise islamophobia when women in hijab or masjids are attacked. But when it comes to encouraging dating and

changing our views on marriage, we start doing mental gymnastics to justify haram relationships. Here's an example from www.muslimgirl.com:

"If you think casual dating is going to lead you to the best possible life partner, by all means, that's your choice. Most Muslims who do date – like me – date to eventually get married; they just might not be old enough yet, or financially or emotionally ready... you're getting to know the person with the intent that it will pay off in the long run because someday in the not-so-distant future you will become wed to that person. They won't feel like a complete stranger." (Anonymous Writer)

Based on this thought process, good intentions can make any haram act acceptable. This mindset leads Muslims raised in the West to wonder why they should wait for marriage at all, as dating relationships are more comfortable because there are "no strings attached." Yet Allah asks us:

"O man! What has beguiled you from your Lord, the Gracious one. Who created you proportionately and fashioned you?" (82:6-7)

So, why are we normalising dating? Inventing oxymoronic terms like "halal dating" betrays a poverty of ambition. Muslim Twitter is

littered with attention-seeking "I married my best friend" tweets. And for five minutes of empty fame, Muslim Youtubers share their "Our dating phase" videos. Muslims need to stop misrepresenting Islam, intentionally or not. In the public sphere, Muslims have a responsibility to be mindful of how they conduct themselves. Via social media, far too many Muslim couples are imitating a lifestyle that is very similar to their non-Muslim counterparts.

It was narrated from Abu Sa'eed al-Khudri that the Prophet (saw) said: "You will certainly follow the ways of those who came before you handspan by handspan, cubit by cubit, to the extent that if they entered the hole of a lizard, you will enter it too." We said: "O Messenger of Allah (do you mean) the Jews and the Christians?" He said: "Who else?" (Bukhari)

It was narrated that 'Abd-Allaah ibn 'Umar said: The Prophet (saw) said: "Whoever imitates a people is one of them." Narrated by Abu Dawood) Islam forbids us from imitating non-Muslim beliefs, customs, and culture that goes against the Quran and Sunnah.

So, what is the Islamic alternative to dating? A Muslim's perspective on life is built on the belief that we were created to worship Allah.

"I have only created Jinn and people that they may worship me." (51:56)

Our decisions, large or small, are shaped by this belief. Islam has an intricate social system with laws that ensure both sexes gain love, pleasure, and tranquillity. Allah created us with the instinct to find the opposite sex attractive and, via the Quran and Sunnah, Allah has given us marriage as a means to fulfil our innate desires. When we follow the Islamic model for getting married, we (inshallah) secure our hereafter.

In the short-term, dating provides instant gratification, but our long-term goal is jannah (paradise). This is why we wait until we can have a relationship that will be a source of reward and barakah (blessings). The Islamic model creates a society that encourages marriage, supports families, and reduces promiscuity in the community. In contrast, liberal societies focus on individual pleasures, disregarding the impact on broader society. When men and women are left unchecked to capitulate to their every desire and whim, we end up with a hyper sexualised society, much like the one we are living in now.

Street harassment, forced marriages, date rape, sexual assaults, and STDs are problems that plague all communities -Muslim and

non-Muslim- when they do not follow their Creator's guidance. The guidance that ensures co-operation between genders discourages us from obsessively thinking about sex to the point that it hinders and endangers women's lives in particular.

In 2021, the murder of Sarah Everard and the outpouring of testimonies of sexual harassment in schools on the "Everyone's Invited" website sharply brought into focus the problem of sexual violence against women and girls in the UK.

In numerous hadith the Prophet (saw) instructed us to view each other not as sexual objects but as a community that supports each other.

"Cooperate with one another in goodness and righteousness, and do not cooperate in sin and transgression. And fear Allah, for Allah is severe in punishment." (5:2)

Abu Musa reported: The Messenger of Allah (saw) said, "Verily, the believers are like a structure, each part strengthening the other," and the Prophet clasped his fingers together. (Bukhari)

This view seeks the good of the community governed by taqwa, not lust. Islam does not deny sexual pleasure but makes it lawful and private via marriage while ensuring people's dignity. The sacred texts provide ample evidence about how and when men and

women can meet, how both genders should dress, and how we should interact with each other. Many of the rulings in Islam protect us from the temptation of zina (fornication) and promote modesty and chastity.

Here are just a few of the rules from the social system of Islam that govern gender interactions. It's essential to study this area further and read the tafsir of the ayat mentioned, so you clearly understand and implement the rules in your life. Anas ibn Malik reported: The Messenger of Allah (saw), said:

"Seeking knowledge is an obligation upon every Muslim." (Ibn Mājah)

Men and women cannot meet in seclusion (khulwa).

Ibn `Abbas said, "I heard the Messenger of Allah (saw) give a sermon. He said, 'A man should not seclude himself with a woman except that there be with her someone who is of unmarriageable kin (mahram).' (Bukhari)

Seclusion is defined as a man and a woman, who are not unmarriageable kin (mahram), being alone in an enclosed area in such a way that a third party cannot easily enter upon them. Umar ibn al-Khattab narrated the Prophet (saw) said:

"Never is a man alone with a woman except that Satan is the third party with them." (Tirmidhi)

So, going on a date where you will be alone in private with a man is not allowed. When this rule is applied we can see how it would prevent date rape from occurring, inshallah.

Men should lower their gaze

"Tell the believing men to lower their gaze (from looking at forbidden things) and protect their private parts (from illegal sexual acts, etc.). That is purer for them. Verily, Allah is All-Aware of what they do." (24:30)

Here is part of Ibn Kathir's tafsir of (24:30):

The Prophet (saw) said, "Beware of sitting in the streets." They said, "O Messenger of Allah, we have no alternative but to sit in the streets to converse with one another." The Messenger (saw) replied, "If you insist, then give the street its rights." They asked, "What are the rights of the street, O Messenger of Allah?" He said,

"Lower your gaze, return the greeting of salam, enjoy what is good and forbid what is evil."

Men and women are instructed to keep certain parts of their bodies covered in public.

Awrah refers to the intimate parts of the body, for both men and women, which must be covered with clothing. Exposing the awrah is unlawful and is regarded as a sin, except in situations of necessity, i.e., a medical examination. The awrah for a man in public refers to any part of the body between the navel and the knees. Whereas the awrah for a woman in public refers to the entire body except for the face and the hands.

When we restrict ourselves from looking at the awrah of men or women in person or images, we guard our chastity because what enters the eyes regularly is bound to find a place in one's heart and mind. In the voyeuristic societies we live in, there are multiple ways in which we've become progressively desensitised to pornographic content. For some, it's the casual glimpse on social media feeds that eventually turn into addictions.

Women should lower their gaze and wear khimar and jilbab when they go out.

"And tell the believing women to lower their gaze. and be modest, and to display of their adornment only that which is apparent, and

to draw their veils over their bosoms, and not to reveal their adornment save to their own husbands or fathers or husbands' fathers, or their sons or their husbands' sons, or their brothers or their brothers' sons or sisters' sons, or their women..." (24:31)

For a detailed explanation of this ayah please read Ibn Kathir's tafsir.

Islam encourages marriage

Marriage fosters love and companionship between a husband and wife, promoting their happiness and respecting their complementary nature. Allah said:

"Among His signs is that He created for you mates from yourselves that you may find tranquillity in them, and He placed between you love and mercy. Verily, in that are signs for a people who give thought." (30:21)

Aisha reported: The Messenger of Allah (saw) said, "Marriage is part of my Sunnah. Whoever does not act upon my Sunnah is not part of me. Give each other in marriage, for I will boast of your great numbers before the nations. Whoever has the means, let him contract a marriage. Whoever does not have the means should fast, as fasting will restrain his impulses." (Sunan Ibn Mājah)

Islam has forbidden sexual relations between men and women outside of marriage.

"It is lawful for you to marry chaste Muslim women and chaste women of the People of the Book, provided you pay their dowry, maintain chastity, and avoid fornication or lustful relations outside of marriage. The deeds of anyone who rejects the faith, certainly, become fruitless. He will be of those who lose on the Day of Judgment." (5:5)

We are commanded to stay away from shamelessness

There are three words for shamelessness used in the Quran.

- Al fahsha: This refers to shamelessness in the general sense, the idea of being inappropriate or doing ugly things. Anything ugly, detestable behaviour is considered fahsha: socially unacceptable speech, clothing, or actions. Vulgarity, lewdness, etc., fall under fahsha.
- Al fahisha: This refers to a particular act of inappropriateness.
- Al fawahish: The plural for both, it includes both al fahsha and al fahisha.

Smart Single Muslimah

"Indeed, Allah commands justice, grace, as well as courtesy to close relatives. He forbids shamelessness (al fahsha), wickedness, and aggression. He instructs you, so perhaps you will be mindful." (16:90)

"And come not near to unlawful sex (avoid all situations that might possibly lead to it.). Verily, it is a fahishah (immoral sin) meaning a major sin" (17:32)

When you DM a guy, you lose your sense of modesty, privacy goes out of the window, sending suggestive selfies becomes acceptable, your texts become more flirtatious. Speaking about prohibited things becomes normalised. Where does it end? When you lose your sense of shame, you are no longer ashamed in front of Allah anymore. Allah warns us:

"Shaitan threatens you with poverty and orders you to commit fahsha (evil deeds, illegal sexual intercourse, sins, etc.) whereas Allah promises you Forgiveness from Himself and Bounty, and Allah is All-Sufficient for His creatures' needs, All-Knower." (2:268)

Ibn Masood (ra) said that the Prophet (saw) said: "Among that which reached the people from the words of the earlier prophet-hood: If you feel no shame, then do whatever you wish." (Bukhari)

In contrast, liberal societies encourage shamelessness by focusing on the individual's rights and freedoms, as long as their actions do not harm others. Unfortunately, this is a global problem that affects the Muslim world, as well. Individualism and personal choice are promoted. Besides, in a capitalist economy, sex has become commodified and transactional. Where there is consumer demand for a product, companies will supply it.

Selling sex is acceptable in a capitalist economy because there is a demand even though there are apparent detrimental effects to individuals and the wider society. For example, in 2015, the pornography industry was estimated to be worth \$97 billion. Most capitalist economies have minimal state regulations, so nothing stops multinational companies from using sexual images to sell their goods. With their multi-million-dollar marketing budgets and militia of psychologists, global corporations are conditioning us to be compliant consumers who accept this sexualisation. Our well-being is not the prime motivating factor. Rather self-interest and maximising profit are.

The problem is that none of us choose whether we want to live in a hyper sexualised society where our desires are constantly being manipulated. Wouldn't you prefer that women and men were repre-

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sented with respect in society? Instead of the female body, in particular, being presented sexually for consumption. We don't need to ape the Tinder culture of non-Muslims, a culture that has created a generation of sex-obsessed commitment-phobes. We need to simply be smart and accept the guidance of our Creator:

"This day, I have perfected your religion for you, completed My Favour upon you, and have chosen for you Islam as your religion" (5:3)

Ali reported: The Messenger of Allah (saw), said to me, "Say: O Allah, guide me and direct me."

I NEVER IMAGINED LIFE WITHOUT A FAMILY

The world's worst wedding anniversary party was in full swing, and there I was, standing in a crowded marquee full of people wishing I were anywhere but there. The Bollywood music was loud, the food way too spicy for my tastebuds, and it seemed like all the guests were married with children or grandchildren and in conversation about family life.

Since I am neither wedded nor a parent, I felt like a pink monkey. Out of the blue, a guest (a distant relative I didn't know I had) asked me in Bengali, 'I hear you're still single.' She sounded like she felt sorry for me. I replied that yes, I was, but I was also a dentist.

“What a shame! Don't take this the wrong way,” she continued, “but I can't comprehend why a woman would ever choose work

over family life. It must be such a sad life without a husband and children.”

I resisted the urge to cry and instead quietly left the party upset and dumbfounded by just how insensitive people can be. I don't need others to make inconsiderate remarks about my not having children. I have spent the past five years, conjuring up enough anguish on my own.

Not being a wife and mother means there is a part of me that remains empty, love that will never be expressed. There is the wisdom I will never be able to pass on, experiences I cannot share, and solace I cannot provide. I never expected to find myself feeling such profound regret due to never having had children.

I didn't expect this to happen, but I can anonymously admit that my life choices have led to me being childless. Like so many other women, I bought into the women's lib model that women should delay marriage and motherhood to establish careers. I was naive. I left it too late to have a family. I always assumed it would inevitably happen at some stage. Things would just fall into place. But I never gave it the focus it deserved.

As a youthful 'fertile' woman with the world at her feet, I embraced feminism with my eyes wide shut pursuing my right to

higher education and a career. If I was offering advice to the young woman I was then, I would say: 'If you want to marry and have children in your 20s, that's just as reasonable a choice as building a career.'

You see, I never imagined life without a family. After all, I'm a Muslim. That's what we do! We get married, we have kids and live happily ever after... I did have marriage proposals in my 20s, but I took them for granted. When you're young, you can be very short-sighted. It didn't occur to me that the number of interested parties would decrease as my age increased.

At 27, I met someone, and we got engaged. We had been together for 6 months. I was sure he would be 'The One.' Right companion, right life-stage; what could go wrong? But then he got a job abroad, and I didn't want to leave the UK, so I was left with no option but to end it. And so, at the age of 28, I suddenly became an unengaged single. I began to feel like one of those books you hear about, left on the shelf, that nobody wants to read.

The years that followed were some of the most difficult of my life, as close friends married and started families. I watched their lives evolving as they grew with euphoric pregnancies and welcomed beautiful babies into the world.

I was profoundly envious and loathed myself for feeling that way as they began exciting new chapters as parents. My life was stagnant, lost in no man's land, impatient with expectation, but nowhere close to finding the man I could settle down and start a family of my own.

By contrast, my career as a dentist was on the up. I was busy and opened my own dental practice. And still, somehow, as the years passed and 30 loomed over the horizon, I remained hopeful that I would be a mother one day. However, amongst Bangladeshis, I was tagged as too old and too qualified. I could have married a divorcee with kids, but I didn't like the idea of being a 'stepmother.' I could have married someone 'back home', but that seemed too much effort and too risky.

A period of sadness ensued in response to what looked like an empty and bleak future. My parents were diplomatic on the subject of having no grandchildren because they know it was a source of sadness for me, but I knew they sincerely feel that gap in their lives. I can see the sadness in their eyes.

And so began a personal battle to build a life in which children would not figure, where I would stand alone in that no-mans-land

increasingly populated by other Muslim women who are unmarried.

It seems I am part of a growing class: one in five women in Britain is childless by the age of 45. The proportion of women without children has approximately doubled since the 90s, and it's the same story in most other developed nations. Concentrating on a career is the foremost reason most women don't have children, but a societal shift away from honouring and valuing mothers' roles is another.

In the past, motherhood was part and parcel of a woman's life: now it has become a lifestyle choice — and one increasing number of women decide against, particularly if they are educated. Did you know, the higher a woman's income, the less likely she is to have children?

Alhumdulillah, as the years have passed, I have come to terms with my circumstance and learned to relish its upsides. I don't want anyone to feel sorry for me. I made some bad choices for which I take full responsibility. But I count my blessings, not least that I can take care of my ageing parents, and I am my nieces and nephews favourite aunt! Not being a mother means I can do voluntary work that would otherwise be impossible.

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Unfortunately, my regrets do hang around like cheap perfume. My life is more impoverished for not having children, and I am less of a woman for not being a mother. There is a vast swathe of experience and growth I will never know. But I am mature enough to have learned that we don't always get what we feel we are entitled to in this life.

Anonymous

WHY ARE SOME MUSLIMS ALLOWING RACISM TO DICTATE WHO THEY MARRY?

I had previously never thought about this question because I had not faced this problem when getting married. However, since speaking to Somali, Jamaican, and African heritage Muslimahs, who were guests on my podcast, they highlighted the Muslim marriage scene's racial prejudices.

Unfortunately, some Muslims have adopted not only racism but nationalism and colourism. Each of these concepts has taken root in our communities and affects our choices regarding marriage. These three unislamic ideas are making it difficult for Muslims to get married. Personal preferences are not wrong in and of them-

selves. After all, beauty is in the eye of the beholder. But when people try to impose their will upon others or deny marriage due to arrogantly conveying that others are lesser due to cultural difference or skin colour: it creates problems. Imagine how easier it would be to find a husband if we were more flexible and open-minded regarding ethnicity, nationality and skin colour?

Nailah Dean from the US wrote about racism in her article 'The hidden racism of the Muslim marriage market' for Al Jazeera.com. She stated, "We cannot defeat racism if we continue to allow cultural biases to govern who we love or who we let our children marry." Just imagine if South Asian parents allowed their daughters to consider African Muslim men for marriage? Women would have far greater choices, and I'm sure it would result in more single Muslimahs tying the knot! The funny thing is Islam tells us to do precisely that!

Some may argue, is racism in the Muslim marriage scene really such a big deal? Isn't it just a few bad apples who won't consider black or darker-skinned Muslims when it comes to marriage? I have found that people who have not faced racism and prejudice are the ones who make such statements. Sweeping this problem under the carpet is not the solution. Honestly, as a Muslim of Pak-

istani origin, I know firsthand that 'lighter-skinned South Asians can be incredibly racist towards black people and Pakistanis have "an over my dead body" attitude towards their daughters considering a Bengali. If we seriously want to address Muslimahs' marriage crisis, we must take the bull by the horns and tackle (with hikmah) these insidious ideas. Let's not be hypocrites, like the British or Moroccan governments, who pay lip service to 'Black Lives Matter' but deny the entrenched racism that exists in their societies at large.

Racism

Racism is defined as the belief that one's race or skin colour is superior to another. Racists say and do harmful or unfair things based on the assumption that their own race makes them more intelligent, reasonable, moral, etc., than people of other races. It's prejudice based upon arbitrary physical characteristics that are not in a person's control.

Such irrational beliefs are the traits of pre-Islamic ignorance and modern-day liberals. White supremacy has existed in western liberal states for centuries. In the article "Intolerance at the heart of Liberalism', Muhammad Jalal explores the issue in detail, he states:

"This crusading spirit of liberalism is unsurprising. The ideology was closely associated with a Darwinian belief that both Europeans and their culture had a duty to civilise and tame other world civilisations' savagery. Rather, this racial and cultural superiority undergirded early liberalism. Immanuel Kant, Voltaire, and Jean Jacques Rousseau all suffered from the hubristic ailments of liberal superiority. Kant, responsible for developing the early notions of democratic peace, suggested in his writings on the *Destiny of Races* that, "The race of the whites contains all talents and motives in itself." And that "The race of Negroes ... can be educated, but only to the education of servants." And that Native Americans "are uneducable... care for nothing and are lazy." (www.traversingtradition.com)

In contrast, Islam teaches us that all people are born equal in the sight of Allah, and the only trait that makes someone superior to another is righteousness taqwa. Allah has blessed human beings with abilities of intelligence and empathy.

"We have indeed honoured the children of Adam and carried them on the land and sea and provided good things for them, and We favoured them over much of what We created, with decisive preference." (17:70).

Abu Dharr reported: The Messenger of Allah, (saw), said:

"Behold! Verily, you have no virtue over one with white skin or black skin, except by favour of righteousness." (Aḥmad)

Abu Musa reported: The Messenger of Allah, (saw), said:

"Verily, Allah Almighty created Adam from a handful which He took from the earth, so the children of Adam come in accordance with the earth. Some come with red skin, white skin, or black skin, and whatever is in between: thin, thick, dirty, and clean." (Tirmidhi)

The only way to resolve this man-made problem is to refer back to Allah's guidance. Allah created races and tribes to recognise each other and learn from each other, not hate and mistreat each other.

"O people, We have created you male and female and made you into nations and tribes that you may know one another. Verily, the noblest of you to Allah is the most righteous of you. Verily, Allah is knowing and aware. (49:13)

Ethnic diversity is part of Allah's plan. Imagine how dull life would be if there was no cultural diversity? We all ate the same food, spoke only one language, dressed in the same style of clothes!

In fact, Allah created different skin colours and languages as signs for us to ponder upon. Just as butterflies and tropical fish come in different colours, all are divine signs of Allah's creation, human beings come in different shades.

"Among His signs is the creation of the heavens and the earth and the diversity of your languages and your colours. Verily, in that are signs for people of knowledge." (30:22)

Taqwa is the only quality that makes someone righteous in the sight of Allah, not race, family or skin colour.

Nationalism and Tribalism

Nationalism and tribalism are anathemas to Islam. They call for indiscriminating devotion to the interests or culture of a particular tribe, people or nation-state. The curse of nationalism is that its adherents feel superior to other people, leading to discrimination and injustice. There are numerous hadith clearly stating nationalism and tribalism are haram.

Abu Dawud narrated that the Prophet (saw) said, "He is not one of us who calls for `asabiyah, (nationalism/tribalism) or who fights for `asabiyah or who dies for `asbiyah."

In another hadith, the Prophet (saw) referring to nationalism said:

"Leave it; it is rotten." (Muslim). Also, the Prophet (saw) said, "There are indeed people who boast of their dead ancestors, but in the sight of Allah, they are more obnoxious than the black beetle that rolls a piece of dung with its nose. Behold, Allah has removed from you the arrogance of the time of jahiliyyah, ignorance with its boast of ancestral glories. Man is but an Allah-fearing believer or an unfortunate sinner. All people are the children of Adam, and Adam was created out of dust." (Abu Dawud). Therefore, Islam binds people together on their belief in Allah and the Messenger (saw).

There are numerous examples in the seerah where the Prophet (saw) had reprimanded those who upheld tribalism. On one occasion, a group of Jews conspired to bring about disunity in the Muslims' ranks after seeing the Aws and Khazraj within Islam. A youth from amongst them was sent to incite remembrance of the battle of Bu'ath where the Aws had been victorious over the Khazraj, and he recited poetry to create division between them. As a result, there was a call to arms.

When the news reached the Prophet (saw), he said, "O Muslims, remember Allah, remember Allah. Will you act as pagans while I am present with you after Allah has guided you to

Islam, and honoured you thereby and made a clean break with paganism; delivered you thereby from disbelief; and made you friends thereby?" When they heard this, they wept and embraced each other. This incident illustrates how the Prophet (saw) rebuked any forms of tribalism. Allah then revealed,

"O you who believe! Fear Allah as He should be feared and die, not except in a state of Islam with complete submission to Allah. And hold fast, all of you together, to the rope of Allah (i.e. Qur'an), and be not divided among yourselves; and remember with gratitude Allah's favours on you; for you were enemies and He joined your hearts in love so that by His Grace you became brothers, and you were on the brink of the pit of fire, and He saved you from it. Thus Allah makes His signs clear to you that you may be guided." (3:102-103)

Qatada narrated that Ibnu Abi Hathim said that in the verses quoted above, Allah has ordered the Muslims to hold fast to the book of Allah, His deen, and to his covenant, and He has forbidden the Muslims to be divided amongst themselves and to dispute with each other.

It is transmitted by at-Tabarani and al-Hakim that in one incident, some people spoke very lowly about Salman al-Farsi. They spoke

of the superiority of the Arabs over the Persians, and upon hearing this, the Prophet (saw) declared,

"Salman is from us, the ahl al-bayt (the Prophet's family)."

Ibn al-Mubarak also transmitted in his two books, *Al-Birr* and *As-Salah*, that some disagreement occurred between Abu Dharr and Bilal, and Abu Dharr said to Bilal, "You son of a black woman." The Prophet (saw) was extremely upset by Abu Dharr's comment, so he (saw) criticized him by saying,

"That is too much, Abu Dharr. He who has a white mother has no advantage, which makes him better than the son of a black mother."

This rebuke had an overwhelming effect on Abu Dharr, who then put his head on the ground, swearing that he would not raise it until Bilal had set his foot over it. These numerous examples categorically illustrate that Muslims should not be divided along racial or nationalistic lines. The Messenger of Allah (saw) taught us that:

"The believers, in their love, mutual kindness, and close ties, are like one body; when any part complains, the whole body responds to it with wakefulness and fever." (Muslim)

And on the authority of `Abd Allah ibn Umar, the Prophet (saw) said:

"Every Muslim is a brother to a Muslim, neither wronging him nor allowing him to be wronged. And if anyone helps his brother in need, Allah will help him in his own need; and if anyone removes a calamity from (another) Muslim, Allah will remove from him some of the calamities of the Day of Resurrection; and if anyone shields (another) Muslim from disgrace, Allah will shield him from the disgrace on the Day of Resurrection." (Bukhari and Muslim)

How can we address our prejudices?

Rather than denying racism in our communities or bringing up 'Bilal' - the Prophet's (saw) sahabah, who was black. We must reflect on our own attitudes, actions, and contribution to the mindset some of us have towards marrying someone who is not of the same colour or race. When we think our light brown skin is better than our sister's dark brown skin, we had adopted the same mindset as shaitan when he said:

He (Satan) said, "I am better than he (Adam); You created me from fire, and created him from clay." (38:76)

Racism exists in the Muslim ummah but varies according to the context. In the Arab world, there is a long history of tribalism and colourism, which preceded colonialism. It is a shameful fact that in

the past, Muslims enslaved black people. Bob Kooigi writes in his article "Forgotten Slavery: The Arab Muslim Slave Trade":

"The trans-Saharan trade or Eastern slave trade is billed as the longest, having happened for more than 1300 years while taking millions of Africans away from their continent to work in a foreign land in the most inhumane conditions." (www.fairplanet.org)

An example of Muslim participation in the slave trade includes the second sultan of the Alawite dynasty, Moulay Ismail (1672-1727), who profited from the trans-Saharan slave trade. In 1699, Sultan Isma'il gave orders to enslave all black Africans in Morocco, even those born free or Muslim. Consequently, he violated two of the central tenets of Islamic law concerning slavery. He generated a potent new form of racist discourse in the region that associated black Africans with slavery. (El Hamel, Chouki. *Race, Slavery and Islam in Maghribi Mediterranean Thought: The Question of the Haratin in Morocco*)

The insidious effects of the trans-Saharan slave trade are experienced by black Muslims living in Morocco today: anti-black racism is vocal and across the board. It is not uncommon for a Non-black Moroccan to refer to a black Moroccan as "abed", which means slave.

The worrying issue has been raised by Imam Dawud Walid in his article "Fellow humans are not abeed." Imam Dawud Walid is currently the Executive Director of the Michigan chapter of the Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR-MI), a chapter of America's most prominent advocacy and civil liberties organisation for American Muslims and is a member of the Michigan Muslim Community Council (MMCC) Imams Committee.

"Calling a black person an "abed" (abed in plural) is offensive. The term has been used for so long in certain segments of the Arab World that many people have become desensitized to its meaning... "Abed" is a term that, at one time, had a general meaning of slave, then became a specific term, referring to blacks, who were viewed as subservient. (www.dawudwalid.com)

Racism and colourism were promoted during the colonial era but were further strengthened within many Arab Americans based upon America's racial hierarchy. Hence, part of why Muslims living in the west hold racist views is because we live in racist secular societies. Every person of colour knows that American and European societies are racist. They only pay lip service to anti-racism. Historically they colonised and enslaved black people, and once black people settled in the US and Europe, they have continued to

face racist attacks and discrimination. Black communities have encountered hundreds of years of structural and societal prejudice, racism, and oppression.

Even when people of colour are ready to give everything up to be embraced by the polity, their colour, cultural mores, and creeds mean that acceptance will always be contingent on their gratefulness and recognition of their inferiority and status.

In popular culture, black people are stereotyped as gangsters and drug dealers, and when it comes to beauty - lighter-skinned black models and black actresses get more work. I'm not naive enough to think Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, or Malaysia are any less racist. After all, their laws are not comprehensively based on Islam. Racism is a global problem.

Inshallah, we have to wake up because we are being conditioned to dislike black people and dark skin when it comes to marriage. I know Pakistani mothers who will say to their sons, "You can't marry a Somali Muslim girl", and many of us have witnessed colourism from our extended family and friends. For those of us who are Arab or South Asian, we've equally been infected by the 'the fair and lovely' mindset and the unconscious bias for lighter skin.

How quick are we to speak up and challenge these ideas and thoughts? How often have we said politely to our own family - this mindset is wrong, and I will not subscribe to it because it is unislamic? This isn't easy - these are ideas that have been ingrained across generations. But unless we actively open our eyes to it, be conscious of it, recognise it and question ourselves, this will never change.

I am not saying there is anything wrong with wanting to marry someone of your own background. There is plenty of evidence to show that familial similarities, language, culture, traditions, and practices contribute to relationship success and compatibility. But at the end of the day, when it comes to finding a partner, whose sunnah are we following? We need to remind ourselves of the sunnah of our Messenger (saw). During his farewell sermon, the Prophet (saw) delivered a strong message against prejudice.

Abu Nadrah reported: The Messenger of Allah, (saw) said in the final days of the hajj:

"O people, your Lord is one, and your father Adam, is one. There is no favour of an Arab over a foreigner, nor a foreigner over an Arab, and neither white skin over black skin nor black skin over

white skin, except by righteousness. Have I not delivered the message?" (Aḥmad)

In 2011, the Pew Research Center's Forum on Religion & Public Life released the report 'The Future of the Global Muslim Population' on demographic trends among Muslim populations worldwide. By 2030, the world's total Muslim population is expected to increase to 2.2 billion people. The report illustrates that globally there are plenty of marriageable Muslims. We just need to be more open-minded when looking for a spouse.

Inshallah, let's judge a potential partner based on their piety and good deeds. Let us recognise the artificial national boundaries that divide us were created by western colonisers, not Islam. With hikmah, let us challenge racist views we know are held in our families and communities.

On the authority of Abu Sa'eed al-Khudree, who said:

I heard the Messenger of Allah (saw) say, "Whosoever of you sees an evil, let him change it with his hand; and if he is not able to do so, then (let him change it) with his tongue; and if he is not able to do so, then with his heart and that is the weakest of faith." (Muslim)

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*"Our Lord! Grant unto us spouses
and offspring who will be the comfort of our eyes,
and give us (the grace) to lead the righteous."
(25:74)*

THE DESIRE TO BE DESIRABLE

Since reluctantly joining the Muslim matchmaking world of online 'halal' dating apps, I have come to know the feeling of 'rejection' on an incredibly intimate level. Rejection has become my middle name, the sign on my forehead that I see when I look in the mirror, and the word that flashes across my mind whenever I see a picture of my smiling face. Rejection, rejection, rejected.

I had always thought of rejection abstractly before this experience. When attempting to write my first novel, I watched interviews with JK Rowling talking about how she was rejected many times before finally being accepted by that one person – that one editor who saw her manuscript's true genius and beauty. Hearing that story always fuelled me with the oomph that I needed to carry on writing in some weird way. I spent hours in front of my computer in cafes, sipping tea and occasionally staring into the rain as I thought about this concept. I was ready for those rejections; I rel-

ished the opportunity because I saw them as a rite of passage, and I figured they might be similar to the other rejections I had already experienced in life through university and job applications – that is to say, that they would be challenging but stimulating, making me work harder and be more resilient.

But being rejected on a dating app has been a completely different experience. I went on the apps because I was getting nervous about turning 28 and not having any marriage prospects on the horizon. It was a dreary Wednesday afternoon at the height of Covid-19, and I had thought to myself that perhaps it was time for me to try this avenue of meeting a person. It wasn't my favourite idea, primarily because of all the bad things I had heard about the online dating world and the fact that its 'halalness' was, at best, questionable.

Still, even so, I had made my mind up and was going to commit to it with the same level of spirit and zeal with which I approached any new project. I was going to put my best foot forward – take really great pictures of myself (professional level ones) and write a very thoughtful and engaging description for the profile. I figured that if I did everything right, nothing could go wrong.

I unblurred my photos and waited patiently for a few days, a week, two weeks – until a decent number of likes and views rolled in. I even went ahead and used my allotted number of likes each day to carefully sift through other people's profiles. But I hadn't made any connections. I stayed on the app for months, had a couple of dead-end conversations that never made it past the pleasantries, and watched as the pile of rejections grew while the number of likes dwindled. Between the matches that never turned into anything and the avalanche of men who were immediately turned off by my photos, it was hard to maintain my morale as the months crept on.

There's no point in sugar-coating it: I was really disappointed. I felt depressed and anxious the whole time that I was there. These rejections of my face, of my presentation, of this vessel inside of which my soul is contained, had more of an effect on me than I had anticipated. Unlike rejections of my writing or applications, I didn't look at the long list of men who had passed up the opportunity to get to know me and feel moved to keep pushing forward. I didn't see them as battle scars, as necessary stepping stones, or even as what they actually were: a bunch of swipes made by semi-distracted men using spur-of-the-moment judgment calls on a still frame of my face.

Instead, I gave them undeserved meaning. I took it personally. Even now, as I write this, I still find myself feeling sad about it. Why does a man (or, in this case, a long series of men) rejecting me based on my picture hurt so badly? After all, isn't it essentially an impersonal rejection? Shouldn't the idea of somebody rejecting my thoughts and actual soul in the form of literature be more painful than somebody swiping 'no' to my face? For them to turn away a fleeting frame that tells them absolutely nothing about who I am? You would think so.

Indeed, the rational side of my brain had gone over this many times and arrived at the same conclusion: that it shouldn't feel as bad as it did. And yet, it did. It does. It sucks. But an even more salient fact is that the comparisons that I'm making between these different types of rejections are not precisely direct correlations; there are factors for why one has left a more significant impression on me than the others. I don't have any way of explaining this. All I know is that this experience has hurt my pride and dignity in a way that other rejections haven't. I get that I'm not everyone's cup of tea. I understand that we all have preferences and the right to pass on somebody we don't fancy. It's all perfectly reasonable. Maybe the issue here is just a numbers thing. Although rejections are nor-

mal, we're not built on knowing, seeing, and watching as the people who reject us do so in double, even triple digits.

Then there's the issue of comparison. The media and Hollywood have told us about beauty and femininity and the woman's role as the irresistible catnip to men's desires. To have such a stark wake-up call that, actually, you're nobody's catnip is unpleasant because it makes you question your femininity. What is it about me precisely that is causing this? What am I missing that other, more successful women have? Of all the things that, out of my curiosity and interest in relationships, I have learned about men and women. The one thing that has always stood out to me as accurate is that men judge and choose a woman first and foremost on her looks. All this other stuff about her being a nice person or a good Muslima or anything else is secondary to most men. And to some degree, the argument can be made that women have also leaned towards this trend in modern times. It's superficial. We all know it, but that doesn't mean that we're going to suddenly change our behaviour. In all fairness, it may even be argued that we shouldn't have to because attraction is ultimately an essential factor that should be deeply considered when choosing a spouse. Not to mention the fact that nobody wants to be the person who's selected despite their

looks. We all want to feel beautiful and attractive to whomever it is that we end up with.

In the end, the experience made me reflect on my own behaviour when sorting through profiles to find matches. I discovered that despite my best efforts of trying to be mindful and serious when approaching the app, it became, over time, an automated process. That as I was swiping, I was unwittingly creating an ideal in my head of the type of face or look that I was most attracted to. Because of the sheer volume of available candidates, I quickly moved through profiles, making snap judgments in some vague hope that this imaginary man would pop-up on the next slide. I was swiping and swiping as if trying to reach the end of something, like a woodland creature burrowing for the next buried thing, before discarding it for the next one and then the next one after that.

The issue that has occurred to me since deleting my profile and giving up on the online thing is that this method of seeking a spouse actually impedes our ability to judge whether we find somebody attractive in real life. As Barry Schwartz says in his book, *The Paradox of Choice*, the more options we have, the less likely we are to make one and be happy with it.

But more than that, it made me remember my younger years at university or in school. Often, I would have crushes or feel particularly attracted to someone, and in all those cases, they were not people who had caught my eye immediately. They weren't from any sort of idea that I had built in my head. Instead, they were just individuals with a certain *je ne sais quoi* about them. An effervescence of personality, a particular base to their voice, a manner of walking or standing or holding their smiles, that had captured my attention and stayed with me long after they'd left. This is all to say that we are more than still images. The attractive things about us cannot be easily captured in a profile, no matter how thought out and curated it is. (There's a whole separate line of thought here expressed in Roland Barthes' book, *Camera Lucida*, that I'm going to resist getting into now).

I think the only thing that has truly allowed me to get some perspective on the matter – on the rejections and the fact that the apps haven't worked for me – has been to remind myself of this: maybe I'm not the sort of woman whose picture is going to knock your socks off, but that doesn't mean that I'm unattractive. I have often heard it said that ultimately, our spouses are already written for us and that Allah will provide them according to His timing. I believe

this is true. But it doesn't change the fact that it still sucks to be rejected and that as women, one of our fundamental desires in life is to be desired. We might not want all the men in the world to be attracted to us, but it equally doesn't suffice to think that there will only ever be one man who'll believe that we're cute. That's not to say that we want more than one husband – more that we want options and mutual attraction.

It's a weird limbo to be in, and especially as a Muslim woman, it's an even stranger thing to admit and talk about. But it's true. We want to be wanted. It's in our nature, and sometimes this bit of hardwiring leads us to make choices that are incompatible with our modesty and our convictions. I don't think it's a secret that these apps exasperate this sort of thinking and that this marketplace of online self-auctioning isn't exactly healthy for our self-esteem or our dignity. I don't have any answers for how else we should go about putting ourselves out there as women, but I am sorry to say that I learned these lessons the hard way, and I wouldn't wish for anyone else to have to go through them.*Piece originally from the blog: *Chronicles of a Fed-Up Muslimah* at chroniclesofafedupmuslimah.wordpress.com

Smart Teenage Muslimah

*"Know you not that Allah knows all
that is in heaven and on the earth?"*

(22:70)

MEN ARE TRASH: REALLY?

As the world becomes more polarised, we are increasingly living in echo chambers, exposed only to opinions that chime with our own. Subjective opinions. We are definitely more quick to believe what our friends and social media feed say, and let's be honest, who has time to fact-check every story. One such belief echoed amongst some single women is that 'men are trash' and hence men are to blame for their unmarried predicament.

I don't think some women even realise that they are doing it. Usually, they are just trying to be witty and believe it's harmless banter. But the truth is, the consequences are more profound than you may realise. It's now becoming acceptable to wholesale put down Muslim men and share insulting memes.

If you speak about how obnoxious men are, you will start to believe it, which is counterproductive to your efforts to find a man who is right for you. You know what they say, "You'll find what you're looking for" If you look for the negative, you will find the

negative! If you're looking for the positive, you will find the positive!

But like so many women, you've been raised in a culture steeped in female empowerment and relentless male-bashing. Let's be honest; that does not lay the foundations for a healthy marriage. You may not identify as a feminist, but you've unwittingly absorbed its tenets nonetheless. Here's a question to consider: when the shoe is on the other foot, and men take one bad example and pass judgement on all Muslim women, how do you feel?

If it's sexist to stereotype women as "gold diggers or airheads", isn't it also sexist to call "men trash"? In 2020 American conservative commentator Tomi Lahren gave a misandristic rant about how men are "trash". She also helpfully offered men advice on how to treat "talented, skilled, ambitious women" like herself and her friends "who have something going on." Lahren is tired of being ghosted and dealing with irresponsible men who don't step up and can't handle independent women. "All of my friends are attractive and successful. Almost every single one of them has an issue with men. If all of these women, including myself, are having issues, then I have to think it might not be us. It might be you. It might be men."

According to Lahren, women can't find a good man or good husband because men are the problem. Does that mean she thinks she and her friends are perfect?

Lahren is certainly not alone in peddling this narrative. A quick search of Muslim Twitter will bring up plenty of lazy gender stereotypes, the sort we'd all be better off without. It might seem like just a laugh, but if you want someone with whom you can share your life, you can't afford to participate in conversations that degrade men. Even in jest, they affect your thinking and subtly influence your attitudes about prospective spouses.

For instance, let's say you fear that you will lose your freedom once you get married, and you hear a joke about a wife who gets one over on her husband, which you then forward on WhatsApp. You're bolstering a negative baseless belief about men: that they are all control freaks. Some men are controlling, but so are some women. Lumping the good ones in with the shady ones is dishonest and unfair. We choose the lens through which we view male behaviour. If you are serious about having a healthy relationship with your future spouse, start viewing male behaviour through an Islamic lens.

Allah didn't create men and women to hate and snipe at each other. Allah says:

"Cooperate with one another in goodness and righteousness, and do not cooperate in sin and transgression. And fear Allah, for Allah is severe in punishment." (5:2)

Al-Nu'man ibn Bashir reported: The Messenger of Allah (saw) said, "The parable of the believers in their affection, mercy, and compassion for each other is that of a body. When any limb aches, the whole body reacts with sleeplessness and fever." (Bukhari)

Abu Musa reported: The Messenger of Allah (saw) said, "Verily, the believers are like a structure, each part strengthening the other," and the Prophet clasped his fingers together. (Bukhari)

Instead of attacking men to prove our strength and power, we are encouraged to cooperate in righteousness. If we convince ourselves that most men are inconsiderate or abusive, we conclude that we're really not missing much. Interestingly this line of thinking does not quell our desire for matrimony and romance. If it did, you wouldn't be reading this book.

Wallowing in cynicism about men affects the kind of signals you send out to men. If you habitually put men down and roll your eyes at their behaviour, you'll give them the impression that you don't hold them in high esteem. Men will keep their distance and find someone who doesn't tar all men with the same brush. Your female friends and family will also pick up your negative vibes, and they

won't think of you next time someone asks them if they know anyone looking to get married.

Jokes and memes bashing men are all over women's social media feeds, and maybe some are based on reality. Specific experiences that happened to one individual. But, the underlining message that we hear is "men are trash", "husbands are useless", and "dads are too strict". These memes are intended to be funny, but the honest truth is they cause discord between the genders.

But, it doesn't have to be this way. Your echo chamber may be funny and validate your opinions, but if it's turning you into a sexist, then that goes against the Quran and Sunnah. So, I'm suggesting a smarter Islamic approach, it's time to make the Prophet's words (saw) more prominent in your life. It makes sense that if you want to marry a man who respects women, shouldn't you show men some respect as well?

On the authority of Abu Hamzah Anas bin Malik narrated the Prophet (saw) said :

"None of you will believe until you love for your brother what you love for yourself." (Bukhari & Muslim)

Smart Teenage Muslimah

*“For Muslim men and women,
for believing men and women,
for devout men and women,
for true men and women,
for men and women who are patient and constant,
for men and women who humble themselves,
for men and women who give in charity,
for men and women who fast (and deny themselves),
for men and women who guard their chastity,
and for men and women who engage much in Allah’s praise,
for them has Allah prepared forgiveness and great reward.”*

(33:35)

WE WANT A RELIGIOUS GIRL BUT NOT TOO RELIGIOUS

I remember when I first started practising my deen more seriously, my primary motivation for changing my lifestyle and habits was the thought of meeting Allah (swt) and having nothing to say about my efforts. So from nearly a decade ago, towards the end of high school, I made some changes. Alhamdulillah, I became practising and tried to implement the deen in all aspects of my life. That included the fundamentals like being consistent with my prayers, seeking knowledge and building a connection with the Quran. And it also included taking my hijab more seriously and ensuring I am practising Islam sincerely and not the watered-down cultural version prevalent in our communities.

At that time, I didn't imagine this would impact my marriage prospects. I actually thought it would make it easier because I had

a stronger sense of identity and a clearer trajectory in life than before and thought it would be easier to connect with like-minded individuals in my community. A decade later, I've come to realise a few things about religiosity and marriage in our communities.

I told myself that just because something is culturally acceptable, I shouldn't take it for face-value simply because everyone else is okay with it. Where many sisters in hijab were comfortable with tight-fitting clothes and significant makeup, I made an effort to avoid that and tried to wear loose-fitting, long clothes with little to no makeup. While this was not an issue on a day-to-day basis, mixed weddings and community events were times where I really stood out.

I was intrigued to find that even religious people in my community didn't see it as an issue to be glammed up for an event where men were around and insight. My parents weren't too pleased with this, and I later realised that their concern was not unfounded. When mothers and sisters of potential brothers are on the lookout for suitable prospects for their sons or brothers, attractiveness is the predominant feature they factor in. I found it fascinating that even aunties that led halaqahs taught Quran or Islamic classes were no different in their approach. Our community's superficial stan-

dards are brought to light when the most slimmest and glammed ladies are the ones these aunties have their eyes on.

When it comes to religiosity in our communities, we find an unhealthy veneration that may be sincerely intended but damaging in its effects. Religious actions or individuals are praised and placed on a pedestal that people admire and view as incompatible with society's normalcy. It's nice to see that in our secular environments, we as people still value religious achievements. But we also need to realise that they're creating an unreal caricature of piety that ostracises the more seriously-practising individuals from mainstream society.

I made the decision after high school to spend time focusing on memorising the Quran. Alhamdulillah, I finished my hifdh and found my relationship with the Quran to be improving. But what I didn't realise was that this veneration followed its way to stab me when it came to marriage. Hifdh comes with a title that causes people to treat you and see you differently, especially in the sub-continental communities. This is more so the case with females since it is not as expected or encouraged for women to do hifdh. While people were supportive and impressed, people also did not want to recommend potential suitors because I was considered 'too

religious' or 'too conservative'. Practising brothers that I interacted with in community events or the Muslim students association did not want to approach me for marriage because they would be intimidated. I am definitely grateful I had the time and opportunity to undertake this task. But I find myself wondering if things would be different had I kept this endeavour strictly private.

It is definitely disheartening to think that people view religious people as an ascetic and other-worldly saint. Like anyone else, these people have emotions, motivations, and ambitions. They have personalities and idiosyncrasies. They are individuals, they are members of our community, they are your classmates and neighbours. Their attachment to the deen does not come at the expense of losing their individuality or their involvement in this world. Extremism in our deen is harmful, and venerating righteous people by placing them on ridiculous pedestals has been a recurring and damaging element in our history.

To the religious single sisters out there who worry that they may never find someone who can appreciate their religiosity, don't lose hope. Remember that the test of tawakkul is the strongest when the odds seem to be against you. You decided to put Allah above all else, and you need to trust that He will take care of you. You need

to believe that if you've given up unislamic ways for Allah, ways that may have made it easier for you to get married, then Allah will replace what you may have lost with something better. But He will do that according to His timeline, not ours.

Abu Qatadah reported: The Prophet, peace and blessings be upon him, said, "Verily, you will never leave anything for the sake of Allah Almighty but that Allah will replace it with something better." Source: Musnad Ahmad 22565, Grade: Sahih (authentic) according to Al-Albani

At the end of the day, our destiny is already written. If we think that changing ourselves to be more accommodating to society's expectations will help us get married, know that our destiny will not change with us. All of these matters are in Allah's hands. Our job is only to try our best and see this for what it is - a test.

Smart Single Muslimah

*"Know you not that Allah knows all
that is in heaven and on the earth?"*

(22:70)

DO YOU KNOW YOURSELF?

Before you begin looking for a person to share your life with, it's essential to first take some time to get to know yourself as a Muslim. That may sound like an odd statement, but when was the last time you sat down and did some serious self-reflection? Have you thought about your life's purpose or what you value the most? Everyone goes through a phase where they ask deep and meaningful questions.

I remember trying to find the answers to difficult questions when I turned 18. Questions like: How can I be sure Allah exists? Is the Quran really from Allah? If Islam is the truth, then why am I picking and choosing which rules I follow?

Self-reflection

Alhamdulillah, reflecting on my beliefs and actions at 18, was the best thing I ever did: it changed the direction of my life completely. I made a lot of dua, read many Islamic books, and spoke to many knowledgeable people until I found the answers I was look-

ing for. The fruits of my self-reflection were that I became convinced Islam was the truth and began to do my best to follow Islam in my daily actions. I finally understood that the purpose of my temporary life was to worship Allah. Instead of solely fearing Allah, I began to love Allah and appreciate all the blessings He gave me. I realised that the next life was eternal, and I had to work hard to secure my place in jannah. So, five years later, when I wanted to get married, I knew I would only be content with a husband who also made Islam a reference point in his life. I wanted someone who would encourage and advise me to become a better Muslim.

Your self-reflection journey will be different from mine, but you must embark upon it before you begin looking for a spouse. In keeping with the higher purpose for which we were created, when you are looking for a spouse, you should work to maintain a focus on the hereafter (akhirah) while also focusing on the concept of being a servant to Allah.

"I have only created Jinn and people that they may worship me." (51:56).

This focus guides your choices to find a marriage partner and shapes what direction your relationship will take. Remembering that you were created to serve and worship Allah helps keep things

in perspective, preventing you from allowing your physical desires to dictate your choices. It is a constant struggle to maintain a focus on the akhirah, given the relentless distractions of life. However, it is precisely this struggle against one's whims and impulses that each person must engage in as part of life's test. It can be both motivating and reassuring to bear in mind that all your efforts to please Allah during your marriage journey are witnessed by Him and will be rewarded by Him.

Adopting a Growth Mindset

Recently I've been learning about what it means to have a growth mindset. It's a fascinating topic, and I think as Muslims, we can apply some of the ideas to the way we view ourselves and our relationships. As conceived by psychologist Carol Dweck and colleagues, a growth mindset is a belief that our abilities and personal traits can be developed and improved.

A growth mindset contrasts with a fixed mindset—the limiting belief that abilities cannot be meaningfully developed and your personal qualities are permanent: you can't change. Proponents of the theory contend that adopting a growth mindset, and rejecting a fixed mindset, can make people more likely to succeed in life.

They propose that individuals with a growth mindset will be more oriented toward self-improvement and more likely to persist in the face of challenges and failures. They will treat them as opportunities to grow rather than signs that their abilities are inadequate.

Another aspect of the growth mindset is to acknowledge we are not perfect. As Muslims, we know only Allah is perfect. We make mistakes, but the important thing is to learn from them. Doing a simple self-reflection exercise will help you develop a growth mindset. Inshallah, you will learn about your strengths and weaknesses and how to create new traits.

Smart Self-Reflection Questions

It is vital that you first reflect on how you view Allah and how important a part Islam plays in your life. I suggest you keep a journal where you can jot down your answers and make notes.

1. Do you use Islam as a frame of reference in your daily actions? If so, how?
2. How well connected are you to the Quran and Sunnah? i.e. Do you read the Quran and hadith regularly?

Smart Single Muslimah

3. Are you open to receiving Islamic advice from friends and family? How have you reacted in the past when someone quotes religious texts to you?
4. Do you enjoy learning about your deen?
5. How do you feel you can improve your consciousness and closeness to Allah in your life? Think of two practical things you can do. i.e. praying salah regularly.

Smart Single Muslimah

*"I have only created Jinn
& people that they may
worship me."*

(51:56)

WHAT IS YOUR PURPOSE IN LIFE?

As Muslims, we understand that our life's purpose is not to merely seek pleasure by fulfilling our desires. Instead, it is to seek Allah's pleasure by worshipping Him and Him alone, which is the path to true happiness. In the Quran, Allah tells us:

"The believers, men, and women, are Auliyâ' (helpers, supporters, friends) of one another; they enjoin (on people) Al-Ma'rûf (good) and forbid (people) from Al-Munkar (evil); they perform As-Salât (prayer), and give the Zakât (charity), and obey Allâh and His Messenger. Allâh will have His Mercy on them. Indeed Allâh is All-Mighty, All-Wise. Allâh has promised the believers -men and women – Gardens under which rivers flow to dwell therein forever, and beautiful mansions in Gardens of Paradise. But the greatest bliss (happiness) is the Good Pleasure of Allâh. That is the supreme success." (9:71-72)

These verses confirm that to truly succeed in this life and experience contentment, we must gain Allah's good pleasure through doing good deeds. How do you achieve a way of thinking where you

are seeking "the good pleasure of Allah" rather than your own personal gratification?

Happiness in Islam

To truly be happy, you must first understand what the purpose of your life is. Why did Allah create you? This may be a subject that you are already clear about, and you are sure about your purpose in life. If you are, then that's brilliant! However, it's absolutely normal for you to have questions about Islam. You may not have had an opportunity to learn about your faith, and it's crucial to find answers to your questions. Allah says in the Quran that we should use our intellect. That's what differentiates us from animals:

Indeed, in the creation of the heavens and the earth and the alternation of the night and the day are signs for those of understanding. (3:190)

If you have some unanswered questions about the evidence for Allah's existence and questions regarding the Quran, please take the time to research this area and get answers.

Since Muhammad (saw) is the one to whom Allah revealed the verses of the Quran, he is, therefore, a Messenger of Allah. Allah chose Prophet Muhammad (saw) to deliver His final message to us

via the Quran. In its pages, you can find the answers to all the essential questions you have, such as: What is the meaning of life? Why did Allah create me? What happens after I die? How can I achieve peace of mind and happiness in my life?

All you need to do is open the Quran and begin reading. The Quran is a book of guidance and a means of spiritual progress. It outlines values and beliefs that give you the tool to become the best person you can be. It teaches a way of thinking that is positive and enlightened.

So, why did Allah create us?

He created us (humankind) to serve Him. In the Quran, Allah says: "I have not created men except that they should serve Me" (51:56).

"Did you think that We had created you in play (without any purpose) and that you would not be brought back to Us?" (23:115)

Regarding the creation of the world, Allah says:

"And to Allah belongs the dominion of the heavens and the earth, and Allah is over all things competent. Indeed, in the creation of the heavens and the earth and the alternation of the night and the day are signs for those of understanding. Who remember Allah

while standing or sitting or [lying] on their sides and give thought to the creation of the heavens and the earth, [saying], "Our Lord, You did not create this aimlessly; exalted are You [above such a thing]; then protect us from the punishment of the Fire..." (3: 189-191)

Society tells you that if you make lots of money, then you'll be happy. If you are fair-skinned, tall, and slim, then you have hit the jackpot. If you have a good-looking husband, Instagramable kids, and a stylish house. They are the things that will bring you endless joy. But from experience, we know that having these things alone does not bring happiness and contentment to our lives.

What is the secret to a happy life?

Getting married isn't the purpose of your life; rather, it is to worship Allah, which leads to happiness even if you don't get married. When we put Allah at the centre of our lives -married or unmarried- that's when we will be truly happy.

So, what does that mean? How do we do that in our daily lives? It doesn't mean that we have to pray all day and fast and not want anything that gives us pleasure, as the following hadith illustrates:

Anas bin Malik narrated a group of three men came to the houses of the wives of the Prophet (saw) asking how the Prophet (saw) worshipped (Allah), and when they were informed about that, they considered their worship insufficient and said, "Where are we from the Prophet (saw) as his past and future sins have been forgiven." Then one of them said, "I will offer the prayer throughout the night forever." The other said, "I will fast throughout the year and will not break my fast." The third said, "I will keep away from the women and will not marry forever." Allah's Messenger (saw) came to them and said, "Are you the same people who said, so-and-so? By Allah, I am more submissive to Allah and more afraid of Him than you; yet I fast and break my fast, I do sleep, and I also marry women. So he who does not follow my tradition in religion is not from me (not one of my followers). (Sahih al-Bukhari)

To lead an Allah-focused life, you need to look at your daily actions and see whether it is in accordance with Qur'an and Sunnah. Before you decide to do something, you need to ask yourself, is this what Allah wants me to do? And have I found out how Allah instructs me to do it? Are my actions in line with the Sunnah of the Prophet (saw)? Or am I just doing what will benefit me and make me temporarily happy in this life?

This may seem like an overwhelming task; however, you first need to adopt this mindset and then start with baby steps. Many aspects of your life are already in line with Islam. For example, you always check if the food you eat is halal. You need to do the same for the other areas of your life. That's what it means to have taqwa when you are conscious of Allah as you make life choices. We don't just do what makes us happy; that's what non-Muslims do.

That's the difference between us and someone who does not submit to the will of Allah. Don't try and overhaul your whole life. An excellent place to start is your salah; if you are praying your salah regularly, obeying Allah in other areas will soon become more manageable, do lots of dua to Allah to guide you.

Jabir ibn Abdullah reported: The Messenger of Allah, (saw), said, "Verily, my prayer, my rites, my life, and my death are for Allah the Lord of the worlds. He has no partner and with this I have been commanded and I am among the Muslims. O Allah, guide me to the best deeds and the best character, for no one guides to the best of them but you. Protect me from evil deeds and evil character, for no one protects from the evil of them but you." Sunan al-Nasā'ī

BE SMART: STOP WAITING, START LIVING

Single Muslim women don't live: they wait. Is that true? Do you feel that way? And what are Single Muslim women waiting for? Are you waiting for marriage so your life can begin? Waiting for your "Ertugul" (or Turgut) to sweep you off your feet? Because without a husband, you are incomplete? As I have mentioned previously, our purpose in life is to serve Allah. In the Quran, Allah says:

"I have not created men except that they should serve Me" (51:56)

Allah also says:

"Among His signs is that He created for you mates from yourselves that you may find tranquillity in them, and He placed between you love and mercy. Verily, in that are signs for a people who give thought." (30:21)

Islam encourages marriage, but we shouldn't think that our sole purpose in life is to get married. In many Muslim households, girls

are taught that "Life begins once you find the one and settle down", like some kind of rom-com cliché. It's not surprising, then, that we start believing that we will be happy only once we get married. We expect our life to follow a particular trajectory: education, work, marriage, and kids. Hence, because such an enormous emphasis is placed on getting married and having children when these milestones are not achieved on time, women naturally feel disappointed.

Society and families are quick to blame women and insensitively remind them of their 'failure' to achieve their marriage goals. But the confusing expectations dictated to women by western liberals and unislamic eastern culture are conveniently ignored. On the one hand, women are expected to be independent and educated, but also beautiful domestic goddesses.

Sometimes marriage is out of our control. We cannot decide who proposes to us, or if we're interested in someone and want to arrange a meeting with our wali, we can't force him to say yes! He has the right to politely decline the invitation.

Marriages indeed happen by the will of Allah, He has created us, and He controls everything; and He knows all things even before they happen. But, we have the free will to make choices. Allah has

given us the power to think, plan, and be proactive in getting married. It's possible to make bad decisions and, as a result, end up not married. Inshallah, we have to be mature, accept responsibility, and learn from our mistakes.

In the meantime, as a single Muslimah, stop waiting and start living your life following Allah's guidance. Ignore the insensitive voices that are making you feel unhappy by reminding you that you're not married.

Instead, raise your hands in dua, knowing that nothing can make you happier than seeking the pleasure of Allah. When you put Allah at the centre of your life, that's when you will be truly happy. Singledom certainly has its charms and undoubtedly offers opportunities for one to take charge of their independent life and be highly productive.

A particular hadith of the Prophet (saw) comes to mind when reflecting on a single life's many bounties. He (saw) advises:

"Take benefit of five before five: Your youth before your old age, your health before your sickness, your wealth before your poverty, your free time before you are preoccupied, and your life before your death" (Narrated by Ibn Abbas and reported by Al Hakim).

When you're young and single, you have fewer responsibilities. There are areas of your life you have control over, and you can focus on rather than worrying about not being married. For example, it's essential to take care of your mental, physical and emotional health. But bear in mind, there's a fine line between taking care of yourself for the right reasons and taking care of yourself for the wrong reasons. Don't improve your habits to make yourself more marriageable. You should make changes because you genuinely want to be a healthy, intelligent, well-rounded Muslimah who values her own self-worth over what others think.

So with that said, here's a list of some of the main areas of your life you should focus on (if you don't already):

Gain Knowledge

The Messenger of Allah (saw), said: "Seeking knowledge is an obligation upon every Muslim." (Ibn Mājah)

An excellent place to begin is learning and knowing the attributes of Allah. This will allow you to understand a bit about Him, so you will learn to put your trust in and depend on Him. Hence, you will not worry when things are not going well and remain calm and patient.

Improving your character and relationships with your family

Aisha reported: The Messenger of Allah, (saw), said: Verily, the most complete of believers in faith are those with the best character and who are most kind to their families. (Tirmidhi).

Now is the perfect time to focus on developing a stronger relationship with your parents and siblings. Once you are married, you will have less time to do this.

Count your existing blessings

Allah the Exalted said: So remember Me, I will remember you. Be thankful to Me, and do not be ungrateful. (2:152)

Your Lord has proclaimed: If you are grateful, I will increase you, but if you are ungrateful, then My punishment is severe. (14:7)

Do this positive psychology exercise: 3 Good Things. It develops gratitude. It asks you to focus on three good things that happened to you on a given day. In the beginning, you might find it challenging to come up with something that you consider "good enough" to be on your list – that's perfectly normal and no reason for self-criticism. You will find that it gets easier over time and that once you

think of one good thing, more good things tend to follow. It's best to do the exercise daily for 10 minutes until it becomes a habit.

For each good thing, give it a title (a sentence that summarises what happened), then write down as much detail as possible. Try to recall how you felt during the event and consider how it makes you feel now. The final step is to write about how this event came about – what caused it?

For example, a 3 Good Things entry might look like this:

My mum and I cooked dinner together. The delicious smell of the lovely food filled the room with warmth. As a family, we all sat down together to eat. I felt grateful for my family, and when I think back, I still feel warm and happy inside.

Love yourself

If you go into a marriage discussion not having worked on yourself, not having come to terms with who you are. Then you are only setting yourself up for failure. Think of it this way: your future partner won't love you until you love yourself. Be your own best friend before you begin to speak to somebody, especially if you're hoping that the person will heal you. Is going to make you whole, is going to make you happy. No one can see your value as a

person if you don't value yourself first. Do the things that make you happy now, whilst you are single. Change your outlook. Develop yourself, evolve so that you can be a happy individual within your present circumstance.

Take care of your health

Taking care of your physical and mental health is so crucial. It has a critical and lasting impact on practically every other sphere of your life.

As well as making you look better, eating healthy and exercising makes you feel better on a day-to-day basis. This has a knock-on effect on your energy levels, mood and confidence.

If you have faced any emotional or physical ordeals that you have not dealt with, then it's a good idea to deal with them before entering a relationship. Talk to friends and relatives and or a counsellor if you need to.

Utilise your talents in the path of Allah

The Prophet (saw) told us that "a young person who grew up with the worship of Allah" will be among the seven who are granted shade by Allah when there is no shade but His. (Bukhari). Get in-

volved in some type of voluntary Islamic work. One of the best ways to take your mind off your worries is to help a fellow Muslim.

Finances and Career

Learn about personal finance. Pay off your debts as quickly as possible. Cut out waste and if you want to, find ways to make more money. Money is a significant source of stress for many people. Most people end up sticking their head in the sand when it comes to finances, but that doesn't make the problems go away. In short, give this area of your life the attention it deserves, so it's not pulling you down in other areas.

Everyone can't have their ideal job or start their own business. But you should like your job. No one wants to be around someone—let alone marry someone—who constantly complains about their work. Now is a perfect time to decide if you wish to change your career path or study. There are actions you can take, right now, towards finding meaningful work that you enjoy, or at least work you don't dread.

UNDERSTANDING PREDESTINATION & FREE WILL IN YOUR MARRIAGE JOURNEY

Qadr means that Allah has decreed everything that happens in the universe according to His prior knowledge and the dictates of His will. He is the Creator of the universe, and He knows who you will marry or if you will not get married. In this chapter, you will gain insight into the role Qadr plays in your marriage journey.

Qadr is an article of faith

It was reported on the authority of Umar, who said:

"While we were one day sitting with the Messenger of Allah (saw), there appeared before us a man dressed in extremely white clothes and with very black hair. No traces of journeying were visible on him, and none of us knew him. He sat down close by the Prophet,

rested his knee against his thighs, and said, "O Muhammad! Inform me about Islam."

The Messenger of Allah (saw) said, "Islam is that you should testify that there is no deity except Allah and that Muhammad is His Messenger, that you should perform salah, pay the Zakah, fast during Ramadan, and perform Hajj to the House if you are able to do so."

The man said, "You have spoken truly." We were astonished at his questioning him (the Messenger) and telling him that he was right, but he went on to say, "Inform me about Iman."

He answered, "It is that you believe in Allah and His angels and His Books and His Messengers and in the Last Day, and in Qadr (fate), both in its good and in its evil aspects." He said, "You have spoken truly."

Then he (the man) said, "Inform me about Ihsaan." He (the Messenger of Allah) answered, "It is that you should serve Allah as though you could see Him, for though you cannot see Him yet (know that), He sees you."

He said, "Inform me about the Hour." He (the Messenger of Allah) said, "About that, the one questioned knows no more than the questioner." So he said, "Well, inform me about the signs thereof."

He said, "They are that the slave-girl will give birth to her mistress, that you will see the barefooted, naked, destitute, the herdsmen of the sheep (competing with each other) in raising lofty buildings."

Thereupon the man went off. I waited a while, and then he (the Messenger of Allah) said, "O Umar, do you know who that questioner was?" I replied, "Allah and His Messenger know better." He said, "That was Jibril (the Angel Gabriel). He came to teach you your religion." (Muslim)

Belief in Qadr includes:

- The belief that Allah knows all things, in general, and in detail, whether in regards to His actions or the actions of His slaves.
- The belief that Allah has written that in al-Lawh al-Mahfooz (the Book of Decrees). Al-Lawh al-Mahfooz is a divine creation of Allah.

Concerning these two matters, Allah says:

"Know you not that Allah knows all that is in heaven and on the earth? Verily, it is (all) in the Book (Al-Lawh Al-Mahfooz). Verily, that is easy for Allah" (22:70)

In Saheeh Muslim, it is narrated that 'Abd-Allah ibn 'Amr ibn al-'Aas said: I heard the Messenger of Allaah (saw) say: "Allah wrote down the decrees of creation fifty thousand years before He created the heavens and the earth."

And the Prophet (saw) said: "The first thing that Allah created was the Pen (al-Qalam), and He said to it, 'Write!' It said, 'O Lord, what should I write?' He said: 'Write down the decrees of all things until the Hour begins.'" Narrated by Abu Dawood

- The belief that whatever happens only happens by Allah's will – whether that has to do with His actions or the actions of created beings. Allah says concerning His actions:

"And your Lord creates whatsoever He wills and chooses" (28:68)

"He it is Who shapes you in the wombs as He wills" (3:6)

Islam is submission to God's will

God willed the universe and everything in it into being. When He means to create anything, He simply commands: "Be", and it is. Nothing happens except by the will of God. A Muslim is a person who intentionally accepts whatever is willed by Allah, whether it is pleasant or unpleasant.

Free will

Belief in Qadr does not contradict the idea that a person has free will concerning actions in which they have free choice. Allah has given human beings the ability to choose to accept Allah's guidance or reject it. We will either enter Jannah or Jahannam based on the choices we make in this life.

"And we showed him (the man) the two paths (of good and bad)."
(90:10)

Allah says concerning man's will:

"That is (without a doubt) the True Day. So, whosoever wills, let him seek a place with (or a way to) His Lord (by obeying Him in this worldly life)!" (78:39)

And He says concerning man's ability:

"So keep your duty to Allah and fear Him as much as you can" (64:16)

"Allah burdens not a person beyond his scope. He gets reward for that (good) which he has earned, and he is punished for that (evil) which he has earned" (2:286)

Allah knows we are capable of obeying him. He knows what choices we will make. He is Al-Aleem (All-Knowing), but He does

not compel us to act. We should realise that Allah is watching us and will bring us to account for our choices.

A believer who understands the concept of Qadr is very conscious of observing Allah's orders and fearing Him. A Muslim endeavours to comply with the commands of Allah and to abstain from the prohibitions, because of their fear of the punishment of Allah, their desire to be in Jannah, and their yearning in attaining that which is greater than all of this, namely the pleasure of Allah (Ridwaan Allah).

Qadr and Marriage

Let's now apply this understanding of Qadr to marriage. People often say, "It's written who you're meant to marry", and that is true. Allah knows if you will get married or not. However, who you choose to consider, who you decline, or which marriage proposal you accept is your choice. Allah does not compel you either way.

Other oft-repeated phrases are "Marriages are made in heaven" or "It was meant to be". These ideas give the impression that we have no control over this sphere of our lives, making us complacent. To illustrate, on Muslim Twitter, I'm sure you have come across "It wasn't meant to be" and "Allah has someone better planned for

me" tweets by Muslims who have broken up with their boyfriend/girlfriend. We can't absolve ourselves from the decision-making process and blame fate or destiny for our choices. We can thank Shakespeare for popularising the idea of "star crossed lovers" and "love at first sight", but it's important we are crystal clear about what is in our sphere of control when it comes to love and relationships.

What is in your control?

Let's take a look at what actions are in the sphere of your control when it comes to looking for a spouse. These are the areas that you should concentrate on and spend time researching what Allah and His Messenger say about them, so you can follow the guidance that has been given to you.

- The ideas that shape your views about marriage is within your control
- Gaining Islamic knowledge about marriage
- Learning the fiqh related to marriage
- Your desires and emotions.
- Your marriage expectations

- If you follow the Islamic method of finding a spouse or choose a haram method
- How much effort you make to find a spouse
- How you deal with disappointment
- Making dua and praying istikharah

Duas you can recite

رَبَّنَا هَبْ لَنَا مِنْ أَزْوَاجِنَا وَذُرِّيَّاتِنَا قُرَّةَ أَعْيُنٍ وَاجْعَلْنَا لِلْمُتَّقِينَ إِمَامًا

'Our Lord! Grant unto us spouses and offspring who will be the comfort of our eyes, and give us (the grace) to lead the righteous.' (25:74)

رَبِّ إِنِّي لِمَا أَنْزَلْتَ إِلَيَّ مِنْ خَيْرٍ فَقِيرٌ

'My lord, I am in absolute need of the good You send me' (28:24)

What is not in your control

Let's now consider what is not in your control. These are things you should not focus your time and energy worrying over because you cannot change them.

- If someone decides they do not want to consider or marry you.
- If an engagement is broken even though it seemed like everything was perfect.

- Unislamic attitudes other people hold about marriage; for example, a family may not allow their daughter/son to consider you because they have racist or ageist views. Getting angry will achieve nothing; you can only advise people and make dua for them.

So, yes, it is correct that marriages happen by Allah's will because He has created us and He controls everything; and He knows all things even before they happen. But as I have demonstrated, we have the free will to make choices. Allah has given you the capability to think, plan, and be proactive concerning getting married.

Smart Single Muslimah

*The Prophet (saw) said,
"When a person gets married,
he has completed half of his religion,
so let him fear Allah
with regard to the other half."
(Bayhaqi)*

WHY DO YOU WANT TO GET MARRIED?

There are a plethora of reasons why you may want to get married. You have probably heard of the famous hadith that teaches us that marriage is half our deen.

Al-Bayhaqi narrated in *Shu'ab al-Eemaan* from al-Raqaashi: "When a person gets married, he has completed half of his religion, so let him fear Allah with regard to the other half."

Let's explore some of the reasons and examine the positives and negatives of each. My intention is to provide some clarity and encourage you to think more deeply about your motivations. Prior to undertaking such a life-changing decision, we should think intelligently about our intentions so they align with our Islamic beliefs.

The Prophet (saw) said, "Actions are only judged by intentions and a person only gets what he intended from that action; whoever's hijra was for the sake of (towards) Allah and his Rasool (saw) then that migration is towards Allah and Rasool (saw), and whoever-

er migrated for the sake of dunya (worldly reason) or a woman to marry then that migration is towards only that worldly reason."(Muslim and Bukhari).

Companionship

To want a partner who will complement you - as opposed to completing you- is a perfect reason to get married and is in line with following the Sunnah. The idea of a companion is a person who travels with you on life's journey, enjoying your company, being there for you, engaging in both the highs and lows. Companionship is a comforting consequence of marrying a person who has similar beliefs, values and life goals.

However, be careful not to over-romanticise companionship. It's easy to view long-term companionship through rose-tinted glasses, believing that your marriage will be an extension of your honeymoon: candlelit dinners, romantic day trips and intimate chats late into the night. Inshallah, with a bit of effort and planning, keeping the romance and fun alive during your marriage is possible. However, please have realistic expectations that both you and your husband will have to focus on the not so romantic aspects of living life after the honeymoon.

When reality kicks in, many newlyweds feel disenchanted when they are both working long hours, and they don't get to spend as much time with each other. It's common for husbands to feel disappointed when they come home to an exhausted wife who is drained after a day of taking care of the kids.

Companionship involves being there for each other through thick and thin. Sharing each other's worries and burdens. Tranquillity comes about when each person feels that there is a partner to rely on during difficult times, share troubles and joys, develop shared visions for the family, and simply be there for each other. When spouses work together to overcome challenges, deal with adversity, or celebrate accomplishments, they can deepen and strengthen the feeling of companionship between them.

To have a strong relationship, you must determine what you mean by companionship and friendship and then learn how your potential partner defines these words. You should also recognise that while your husband could be an incredible friend and companion, you should also have other friends to have a harmonious and happy time together.

Safeguarding your chastity

Protecting yourself from unlawfully fulfilling your desires, i.e. fornication or adultery, is one reason why Islam mandated marriage. Muhammad (saw) said, "O young people! Whoever among you can marry should marry because it helps him lower his gaze and guard his modesty (i.e. his private parts from committing illegal sexual intercourse etc.). Whoever is not able to marry should fast, as fasting diminishes his sexual appetite."(Bukhari)

Some people mistakenly take this hadith to mean that the sole purpose of marriage is to satisfy physical desires, and the only way to alleviate the frustration they feel is to tie the knot, pronto. Some find themselves attracted to someone and quickly decide to get married simply to gratify these needs. It is necessary to get married if you want to legitimately satisfy your desires. However, you can't build a truly long-lasting relationship on physical attraction alone. We mustn't be naive; marital relationships are much more complex and not solely for sexual gratification. When you complete a marriage contract, it involves a serious commitment. Don't allow your desires to dictate your actions.

Muslim couples who are dating are often under intense pressure from their parents to make the relationship "halal" and get married.

This is understandable, but it's essential to explore whether the couple is truly compatible in the long run or whether their relationship dynamics are healthy. Unfortunately, when the couple succumbs to social pressure without doing the preliminary work before marriage, divorce is often the regrettable outcome.

The relationship may have been entirely based on having fun and not have all the essential elements for an enduring, healthy marriage. If you are dating someone, my advice is to stop dating. Instead, start meeting them with your family members and begin having serious discussions about marriage and your expectations about your long-term future together. If your boyfriend isn't willing to do this, it shows he is not mature or serious, and you need to stop wasting your precious time with him.

Furthermore, do not get influenced into entering a hasty nikkah conducted without a civil or written contract, simply to avoid the stigma of dating or so you can be intimate with someone you are attracted to. On university campuses, there is a phenomenon where lonely Muslim students are getting married without their families knowledge. Young adults, as well as some older adults, approach imams to do a quick clandestine nikkah. They base their decision purely on the need for instant gratification without considering the

long-term consequences of such relationships. Marriage in Islam is viewed as a means to protect yourself, an institution through which love and intimacy can be legitimately nurtured. So beginning your marriage by bending the rules or finding a loophole will not achieve that result.

Freedom

If you are miserable living at home, marriage can seem like an attractive option to escape your unhappiness. Maybe you want your independence, think your parents are too domineering, or marriage is the only way you will get to leave your hometown. Using marriage as a gateway to escape a current challenging situation often leads people to leap into a relationship without due diligence. It's also unrealistic to expect your spouse to "save you"; after all, they are just as flawed as the next person. Are you planning on telling him his part in your escape plan? If you feel you can't resolve your issues with your parents, at least make sure you don't rush into a marriage without making sure you are compatible. Otherwise, your marriage will be another circumstance you have to break free from a few years down the line.

Starting a family

Having kids is a natural part of life and one of the purposes of marriage. When you are considering a person for marriage, think about whether you would want them to be the father of your kids. Are they responsible? Are they financially secure? Don't shy away from asking if they want to have kids? Just yesterday, a sister told me that her friend was getting divorced after five years of marriage because her husband told her he did not want kids. She had not known that before they got married. She had assumed he would because, in general, Muslims want kids. But some people don't so you must ask questions about raising children, discipline, number of kids, parental roles etc. Understanding each other's expectations about kids and family will help you decide if your values align.

Family pressure

It's every parents wish to see their daughter happily married. Sometimes, parents ideas of what their daughter needs to be happy can be very different from what would truly make her happy. We have all heard appalling stories of parents arranging their daughter to marry a relative, believing they know best and assuming their

obedient daughter will give her consent but forced marriages are not permitted in Islam.

Aisha reported: I said, "O Messenger of Allah, should women be asked for their consent before marriage?" The Prophet (saw) said, "Yes." I said, "Indeed, sometimes a virgin is too shy to speak when asked." The Prophet said, "Her silence is her consent."(Muslim)

If you find yourself in this challenging situation due to misplaced obedience, do not remain quiet. If you do not want to get married, say so. Allah has given women the right to choose their husbands. A husband they find attractive and who they will be compatible with. Your parents do not have the authority to take that away from you.

It's also unfair on the intended spouse. He has no idea you are being pressured into marrying him and won't understand why you are so unhappy. A happy marriage cannot be built on emotional blackmail or deception.

DO YOU HAVE REALISTIC EXPECTATIONS OF MARRIAGE?

One of the first steps to finding a marriage partner is to know what you want and what you need and to apply that criteria when looking for a spouse. Before you do anything, you need to sit down with a piece of paper and pen and figure out what type of person you are looking for.

You might be surprised to hear that the things you think you want before marriage and the things you want after the wedding are often very different. For example, a man may consider that marrying someone attractive is a high priority, but once they get married, if their wife can't cook and doesn't know how to manage a home, that is a problem. Therefore, being honest with yourself about what you really want is so important.

Do you have realistic expectations of marriage?

You need to think about this carefully and ask yourself what you expect from marriage and what married life looks like to you? This question should be explored before someone even walks through your door. It's interesting, because when people have said to me that they want to get married and then when I've asked them, "What type of person is it that you want?" they haven't thought about it. There is no point in starting that conversation and getting people looking for you when you haven't figured it out yet.

When I got married 20 years ago, my husband had friends who wanted to get married, and I had unmarried friends. Alhamdullilah, we knew there was a lot of reward in helping people to get married, and we knew the hadith. I'm paraphrasing that "A tree will be planted for you in jannah if you help two Muslims get married," and so we realised that it was something that we'd like to do. Alhamdulillah, we did do that, and may Allah keep those marriages healthy, and inshallah Allah rewards us for doing that.

Sometimes people say one thing to you: they want someone Islamic or someone who has a beard or someone who gives circles at the masjid, but then when it boils down to it, they reject those people. It turns out they wanted someone who earns lots of money and owns an Audi. Don't waste anyone's time if they're going to put the

effort in to help you. My advice here is going to be really honest. This is not a light topic.

The other thing I would say is that you need to have realistic, not idealistic, expectations. Don't have sky-high unrealistic expectations, for example, how much you expect your future husband to be earning; house prices can be costly, and renting can be very expensive.

Similarly, unemployment is on the rise, so people have to take jobs they otherwise may not want to take. For example, people look down on taxi drivers and people who work in supermarkets, and it's odd because I used to do that as well. I live in the area – and I don't live in a slum or some ghetto, by the way - where it's easy to be a drug dealer – this is what it's like nowadays. I know of young men whose fathers are taxi drivers or working in grocery stores, and their sons look at their father's jobs and think, "I don't want to do that. It's easier to make money by selling weed." Let's not glorify this for a second, people think weed is less than cocaine and heroin, but it's not because both of them are haram and destroy families and young people, and these Muslim boys are delivering drugs to their brothers and sisters.

I'm saying that we should have more respect for a taxi driver who is earning their income and gaining their rizq in a halal way, com-

pared to a lazy drug dealer who drives a BMW. Of course, the man you marry has to earn money, but be realistic about the type of job, the pay, and even whether he has his own home, or whether you have to live on rent for a few years. Have sensible, grounded expectations.

Our Quran and Sunnah provides timeless guidance to all humanity. What better place is there to acquire our marital expectations than our sacred texts? This well known hadith is an excellent starting point for understanding what is expected of a husband and wife in Islam. Abdullah ibn Umar reported: The Messenger of Allah, (saw), said, “Every one of you is a shepherd and is responsible for his flock. The leader of people is a guardian and is responsible for his subjects. A man is the guardian of his family and he is responsible for them. A woman is the guardian of her husband’s home and his children and she is responsible for them. The servant of a man is a guardian of the property of his master and he is responsible for it. No doubt, every one of you is a shepherd and is responsible for his flock.” (Muslim)

There are certain things you expect from your husband - that he's going to provide, that he's going to spend time with you, be caring and considerate. You need to then think and be aware of what

you're going to bring to a marriage because it is a two-way relationship, so you both have to be willing to adapt. You need to understand that your life as a single person is very different from your life as a married woman and as a wife. Are you ready for that role and responsibility? Do you even know what that role and responsibility will be? Getting married isn't like having a halal boyfriend and that you're just going to be going out to restaurants and movies.

I remember watching this hilarious Bollywood movie with two famous actors, Amitabh Bachan and Rekha. Rekha (the wife) thought that they were going out to dinner every night. But after a week Amitabh Bachan (the husband) asks, "When are you going to cook dinner at home?" Like you will have expectations, the man will have expectations, so you have to consider what you will be bringing to the marriage and write that list down. You need to consider whether you know how to manage a house, take care of the shopping, cooking and the cleaning.

Sisters, we need to realise that no matter how qualified we are and how successful we are in our career, once we get married and have children, our primary role is a homemaker – I wonder how many people are telling you that? When I'm telling you this, I mean it in a really thoughtful and sincere way because this is what

married life entails; you have to ask yourself - do you want this life? If you don't, that's fine, but you're not ready to get married, and that's the reality.

It's true that in Pakistan and Arab countries if you're of a particular financial level, you can afford a cook and a cleaner and alhamdulillah why not... but I'm talking about in England, where we don't generally have cooks and cleaners... we do the laundry, we do the shopping. It is disingenuous to not point this out to sisters.

Start learning how to cook from your mum or enrol in an online cookery course. If your parents are super cool and don't give you any chores, maybe you need to start volunteering to do some, or perhaps you're okay, and you already do.

I would also say that if you don't have any friends who have young kids, you need to find some or go and visit your aunt who's had a baby. You need to start seeing what life is like for married women with children. You don't want to be unprepared for married life, and I've seen it in some people, where the lifestyle change is so significant and unexpected, and it can cause problems.

So, you could say I'm telling you to do marriage work experience, in a way. Ignore what you see in movies and TV programs; that's nonsense. Although I must admit some of it is funny, it's not

reality. It may shock you when you hear someone talk practically about what the change is.

Before we decide which career path to choose, we usually get some work experience. When I was at university, I did two weeks of work experience at a high school, and I really got to see what it's like to be a teacher. When I then went into teacher training, I observed teachers for a while and did a bit of teaching for half a lesson. I was slowly eased into teaching a whole class.

Hearing the teachers moaning in the staff room really helped me to understand what it was like, and subhanallah, I should've realised then that working in a UK state school was not for me. That's what I'm saying to you that you need to do, and it is something practical you can start preparing yourself for. Speak to a newlywed, and I'm not saying to be really nosy and dig into their personal lives; they'll be pretty honest with you on what you should look for and what you should think about.

When you first think about marriage, there are some issues that you may wish to consider:

- What are your reasons for getting married? That's something that you should write down: are you looking for companionship? A soulmate? Love? Children?

- Or is it just something you think that you are expected to do? The clearer you are about the reasons for getting married, the easier it can be to find someone whose ideas match your own and will help you find someone who has the same reasons.
- What do you expect from marriage? Make a list of the essential things and the things that would be nice but that you are prepared to compromise on. Refer back to your reasons for getting married, as they will influence what you will expect, don't make the list too long.

When I wanted to get married, I decided that I wanted an Islamically minded man and someone that is going to help me to get to jannah. I'm being frank here; that's the dua that I kept doing. I really didn't care about whether he had a lot of money, and I'll be honest, my husband did not have a lot of money when we first got married Alhamdulillah, it was not a problem, Allah gave us our rizq. I didn't care about what nationality he was, and so I didn't marry someone who was the same ethnicity as me and Alhamdulillah. My parents were cool with that.

If you have a long list, it will narrow down the possibilities compared to a broader list based on Islamic principles. Of course, you must be attracted to someone who you marry, that's a no-brainer, and no one is saying you have to compromise on that.

Smart Single Muslimah

It's interesting to note that what women find attractive is different from what men find attractive. There is also no strict definition of who is handsome and who is good-looking for men as it is compared to women. I think we all know that the definition for women is getting narrower and more specific and is very Eurocentric: it's thin, fair, long hair, almond eyes etc., you know better than I do. When it comes to men, there are certain things like confidence and the ability to provide, but it's not that strict, it's a good thing, and we should keep it that way.

Whether it's social media or movies or Bollywood or specific definitions of what is handsome or good-looking, following these criteria will make it harder for you to choose someone. Ultimately, beauty is in the eye of the beholder, so keep that in mind and keep to the essentials and what you are willing to compromise on. For example, I knew people who would not consider people who aren't in London, and I thought they really narrowed it down; you should at least consider people from other cities.

I'll tell you a funny story, my aunt, Alhamdulillah, is a really intelligent woman and is a matchmaker in Pakistan. She said that nowadays, people's criteria have become ridiculous. They want some kind of Prince Charming or Hourai (heavenly maiden). Even if they are not the most gorgeous looking person in the world, they

want someone gorgeous, wealthy, and highly educated. She said it's impossible to find these imaginary people. I think hearing that from a matchmaker, we need to listen to her. She said that people who make their lists more realistic get married. So be flexible.

You may want a partner to have xyz, but what can you offer a potential spouse? Common problems around "finding someone" are caused by lopsided expectations. Reflect on your strengths, weaknesses, likes, and dislikes with honesty, sincerity, and realism. Start taking responsibility in this area of your life by focusing on what kind of life you want to live and what type of spouse you want to be. The best way to find an honest, god-fearing person is to become an honest, god-fearing person.

You may need to ask your friends what they think of your strengths and weaknesses. Do you have very little patience with people? Are you a taker more than a giver? Be honest about that and remember that marriage is a life changing experience.

Single life and marriage life can never be the same; accept this and embrace the differences with positivity. Look forward to having someone to share life's journey with. Wouldn't it be boring if the single life that you're living now never changed? Getting married is a new beginning and an opportunity for new experiences. Why would you want your life to remain stagnant? Think of it in

that way and how you're going to do something different now. It's a bit like a growth mindset, and that you're being open to new avenues and new opportunities.

Be really clear about what you want before you start asking people. You should have a plan for having the right mindset. What is the Islamic perspective that you should have about marriage? Have you got that? If you haven't, that's fine, but you need to get it. What are you going to do to get it? You have to do something. Alhamdulillah, Islam is not just a set of ideas and a philosophy. It gives us practical ways to do things. It's the ideas that are the impetus, and so we think about what we are going to do. We can't underestimate the thinking process first, don't jump into anything. We're not irrational, we think things through, we get our intentions really clear, and of course, we make dua.

In conclusion, when you have clear expectations and know the type of person you're looking for, you can ask Allah to put that type of person in your path. When someone approaches you, use your list as your guide. Emphasise what is essential to you and make sure you understand what is critical to your potential partner. If they don't meet your expectations (even if you find them attractive), be smart, and don't consider them. Inshallah, using your head rather than your heart will save you a lot of time and heartache.

Smart Single Muslimah

*“There is no Muslim who calls upon his Lord with
a dua in which there is no sin or severing of family ties,*

but Allah will give him one of three things:

*Either He will answer his prayer quickly,
or He will store (the reward for) it in the Hereafter,
or He will divert an equivalent evil away from him.”*

They said: “We will say more dua.”

He said: “Allah’s bounty is greater.”

(Tirmidhi)

THE POWER OF DUA IN YOUR MARRIAGE JOURNEY

If you are truly serious about getting married, then start by making sincere dua. Think of dua as your new best friend. Before you upload your selfie on a Muslim marriage app, make dua before you speak to a matchmaker, make dua. Taking a leaf out of Umm Salamah's book, this famous female companion of the Prophet (saw) was widowed after migrating to Madinah with her husband, Abu Salamah. He was wounded while fighting in the Battle of Badr. One day while Umm Salamah was nursing him, he said to her: "I heard the Messenger of Allah saying: Whenever a calamity afflicts anyone he should say, "Surely from Allah we are and to Him we shall certainly return." And he would say, 'O Lord, give me in return something good from it which only You, Exalted and Mighty, can give."

Abu Salamah remained ill in bed for several days. One morning the Prophet (saw) came to visit him. With the Prophet (saw) at his bedside, Abu Salamah passed away. The Prophet (saw) closed Abu Salamah's eyes, raised his hands to the heavens, and prayed: "O Lord, grant forgiveness to Abu Salamah. Elevate him among those who are near to You. Take charge of his family at all times. Forgive us and him, O Lord of the Worlds. Widen his grave and make it light for him."

Umm Salamah recalled the dua her husband had made and began repeating it: "O Lord, with you I leave this my plight for consideration . . ." But she could not bring herself to continue . . . "O Lord give me something good from it", because she kept asking herself, "Who could be better than Abu Salamah?" Pushing aside her hesitancy, she completed the supplication.

The Muslims were anxious about Umm Salamah. She became known as "Ayyin al-Arab," the one who had lost her husband. Alone and heartbroken, she had no family in Madinah except her small children. Both the Muhajirun and Ansar felt they had a duty to Umm Salamah. When she had completed the Iddah (three months and ten days), Abu Bakr proposed marriage to her, but she

declined. Then Umar asked to marry her, but she did not accept his proposal either.

The Prophet (saw) then asked for her hand, and she replied: "O Messenger of Allah, I have three characteristics. I am an extremely jealous woman, and I am afraid that you will see in me something that will anger you and cause Allah to punish me. I am a woman who is already advanced in age, and I am a woman who has a young family." The Prophet (saw) replied: "Regarding the jealousy you mentioned, I pray to Allah the Almighty to let it go away from you.

Regarding the question of age you have mentioned. I am afflicted with the same problem as you. Regarding the dependent family you have mentioned, your family is my family." Alhamdulillah, soon after they were married. Maybe you're experiencing the same kind of pessimism as Umm Salamah. However, her story illustrates that Allah can answer your duas in a way you can never imagine.

Dua is the first step to making sense of your current dilemma. You should get into the habit of making dua regularly. We all know the power and importance of prayers, but sometimes we forget. For those of us living in liberal, secular societies such as the US and the UK, it's evident that religion plays only a cameo role. It's

pushed to the periphery of life and just makes a brief appearance during christenings, weddings, and Christmas.

Unconsciously this mindset is influencing our thinking when it comes to making dua. Over time, in liberal states, a societal shift occurred; the role of religion is accepted but as a benign instrument, not as a guide in all walks of life. We are feeling the cultural consequences of that shift, so we sometimes forget to make dua.

How are we taught to solve our problems? By focusing on the supremacy of our individual talents and limitless potential. We are told to believe in ourselves, rely on our brainpower, skills, and knowledge. "You can do anything you set your mind to!" To rely on God is backward, old-fashioned, and unscientific. Unwittingly, we absorb these unrealistic ideas from popular culture and social media. But these empty slogans ignore our need for divine guidance.

Allah created us with two undeniable attributes: human fitrah and a mind to comprehend His existence. We have an inbuilt disposition to search for and recognise the Creator. We are not independent, self-sufficient beings. We need our Creator's help. We are weak and needy. Without water or warmth from the sun, we would be dead in approximately three to four days. We cannot cause rain

to fall or the sun to rise. In the Quran, Allah encourages us to pause and ponder on His creation:

Indeed, in the creation of the heavens and the earth and the alternation of the night and the day are signs for those of understanding. (3:190)

And Allah has sent down rain from the sky and given life thereby to the earth after its lifelessness. Indeed, in that is a sign for a people who listen. (16:65)

Like Prophet Ibrahim (as), we search for the perfect Creator of the sun, moon, and stars. Alhamdulillah, through the Quran and Sunnah, Allah has blessed us with a system to sanctify Him. An essential part of that system is dua. Remember, you will never find perfection in yourself, nor can you solve your problems on your own. Navigating the swinging pendulum of life's highs and lows is no easy task. You need to utilise the most effective tool at your disposal and the best weapon in your arsenal: dua.

Let's remind ourselves of why dua is so powerful. Your Lord has proclaimed:

"Call upon Me, I will respond to you. Surely those who are too proud to worship Me will enter Hell, fully humbled." (40:60).

The Prophet (saw) said: "Supplication is worship itself." (Tirmidhi)

In his book, *Shan al-Dua*, Khattabi writes: "The meaning of dua is the servant asking his Lord for His Help, and asking His continued support. Its essence is that a person shows his neediness to Allah and frees himself from any power or ability to change (any matter by himself). This characteristic is a sign of servitude, and in it is the feeling of human submissiveness."

Abu Hurairah narrated that the Prophet (saw) said, "There is nothing more noble in the sight of Allah than dua" (Tirmidhi and Imam Ibn Majah).

When you engage in dua, you display the utmost humbleness and accept that no one can assist you except Allah. Therefore dua is the essence of worship. Allah declares in the Quran:

Say (O Muhammad): "My Lord pays attention to you only because of your dua to Him. But now you have indeed denied (Him). So the torment will be yours for ever (inseparable permanent punishment)." (25:77)

In his tafsir of the above ayah, Qurtabi writes that Allah is telling us: I have not created you because I have need for you, I have only

created you so that you may ask Me, so I will forgive you and give you what you ask."

The Prophet (saw) said: "Your Lord, may He be blessed and exalted, is characterised by modesty and generosity, and He is so kind to His slave that, if His slave raises his hands to Him, He does not let him take them back empty." (Abu Dawood)

Umar had an excellent understanding of dua and that Allah is Al-Mujeeb (the One who responds). He once commented:

"I am not concerned whether Allah will respond to my call when I call Him or not. I know for a fact that if I ask Allah for something, He will give me that which is best for me. I am not worried on His part. Rather my concern and worry is on my part. Whether I will put the effort to make dua, whether I will take action and exhaust the means to get my dua accepted. Because I know if I make dua while being certain and I take action, then Allah will certainly respond and give me that which is best for me."

In addition to Allah being Al-Mujeeb, He is also known as, Al-'Aleem (The All-Knowing), As-Samee' (The All-Hearing), Al-BaSeer (The All-Seeing) Al-Qareeb (The Very Close & Near).

The following Hadith Qudsi illustrates the power and majesty of Allah:

O, my slaves! If the first of you and the last of you, and the humans of you and the jinn of you were all to stand together in the same exact time and asked Me for something. And I were to give everyone what he or she requested, then that would not decrease nor diminish whatever I own and whatever I possess! Except what is decreased in the ocean when a needle is dipped into it. (Muslim)

The etiquette of making dua

Here are some guidelines and recommendations we should follow when making dua. Ibn al-Qayyim writes:

Dua and the seeking of protection from Allah are like weapons, but the sharpness of a weapon is not sufficient for it to cause effect, for the person that handles it also plays a role. So whenever the weapon is a perfect one, having no blemish in it, and the forearm is strong, and there are no preventing factors, then it will cause an effect on the enemy. But if any of these three factors are missing, then the effect will also be lessened. So, if the dua in and of itself is not correct, or the person making the dua has not combined between his heart and tongue in the dua, or if there is a preventing factor, then the desired effect will not occur. (Al-Da' wa al-Dawa')

Only Allah can answer your dua

You must fully believe that only Allah is capable of hearing your prayer, and only Allah has the power to grant you a loving spouse.

The Quran mentions this fact in (27:6) :

"Who (else is there) that responds to the call of the one in distress when he calls out, and He removes evil (from him), and makes you inheritors of the earth? Is there any other God besides Allah? Little is it that you remember!"

Be mindful

When asking for a God-fearing husband, pray to Allah with a sincere heart. Abu Hurairah narrated that the Prophet (saw) said, "Make dua to Allah in a state that you are certain that your dua will be responded to, and know that Allah does not respond to a dua that originates from a negligent, inattentive heart".(Tirmidhi)

Be in a state of wudu

One of the etiquettes of dua is that a person be in a state of wudu (ritual purity) while making dua. This is illustrated in the hadith of Abu Musa al-Ashari, in which he stated that the Prophet (saw) af-

ter the Battle of Hunayn, called for water, performed wudu, then raised his hands and said: "O Allah! Forgive Ubayd ibn Amir!"

Raise your hands

Amongst the etiquette of dua that is known by all Muslims, young or old, is that of raising one's hands while making dua. Abu Musa al-Ashaari, who narrated: "The Prophet (saw) made a dua, and I saw him raise his hands until I could see the whiteness of his armpits".

And Ibn' Umar narrated: "The Prophet (saw) raised his hands and said: "O, Allah! I ask your protection for what Khalid has done!"

Face the Qiblah

Abdullah ibn Zayd narrated: "The Prophet (saw) left (Madinah) to this prayer place seeking rain. So he made a dua and asked for rain, then he faced the qiblah and turned his cloak inside-out". Imam al-Bukhari put this hadith in a chapter entitled, "Making dua facing the Qiblah," showing that it forms the etiquette of dua.

It has also been narrated that when the Quraysh tormented the Prophet (saw), he '...faced the Ka'bah and made a dua against them.

So we are encouraged to turn towards the qiblah when we wish to make dua.

Send blessings upon the Prophet (saw)

The Prophet's (saw) said: "Every dua is covered until (the person) prays upon the Prophet (saw)". The dua is covered means that it is not raised up to Allah until the person making the dua accompanies it with the prayer upon the Prophet (saw). However, it seems that this is not an essential condition since the Prophet (saw) himself did not practice this all the time.

Pray with humility and fear

We must show humility to our Creator and humble ourselves before Him while making dua.

"Call upon your Lord with humility and in secret. Verily, He does not like the aggressors." (7:55)

Recite the names of Allah

"And to Allah belong the best names, so invoke Him by them."
(Quran 7:180)

When we contemplate the meaning of Allah's names, our love for Allah increases. The best way to appreciate the meaning of these names is to use the appropriate one when making dua. When you feel worried or hopeless about marriage and asking for peace of mind, use Allah's name as-Salam (The Perfection and Giver of Peace). When you need Allah's guidance in choosing a righteous spouse, invoke Allah's name al-Haadi (The Guide). If you are confused about how to begin seeking a spouse, recite Allah's name al-Wakeel (The Trustee, The Disposer of Affairs) to help you make the correct decision. When you ask for sustenance, use Allah's name al-Razzaq (the One who Provides) and al-Ghani (the One who Gives and does not require anything). Whatever you are asking for, there is a divine name that you can use in your dua.

The best times to make dua

There are many specific times to make dua that have a higher chance of being accepted by Allah, as mentioned by the Prophet (saw). You should increase your dua during these times and start incorporating them into your daily routine immediately.

At the end of an obligatory salat

Begin a habit of making dua after your obligatory prayers. Narrated Abu Umamah: that Allah's Messenger (saw) was asked, O Messenger of Allah, which supplication is heard by Allah, he said at the end of the night and at the end of the obligatory Salat (Tirmidhi).

While prostrating

When you place your forehead on the ground in sujood, you are the closest to Allah. Abu Hurairah narrated that Allah's Messenger (saw) said: 'The nearest a slave can be to his Lord is when he is prostrating, so invoke (supplicate) Allah much in it. (Muslim)

The dua of a Muslim for his absent sister or brother

The Prophet (saw) said: 'There is no believing servant who supplicates for his brother in his absence where the angels do not say, 'the same be for you" (Muslim). If you have friends who also want to get married, make dua for them.

While visiting the sick

Umm Salamah narrated that the Prophet (saw) said: 'When you visit the sick, you should utter good words because the angels say 'Ameen' to whatever you say (Muslim)

Ali reported that the Prophet (saw) said: "When a Muslim visits his sick Muslim brother in the morning, seventy thousand angels make dua for his forgiveness till the evening. And when he visits him in the evening, seventy thousand angels make dua for his forgiveness till the morning, and he will be granted a garden for it in Jannah." (Tirmidhi).

The last third of the night

Abu Hurairah narrated that Allah's Messenger (saw) said: 'In the last third of every night our Rabb descends to the lowermost heaven and says; "Who is calling Me, so that I may answer him? Who is asking Me so that I may grant him? Who is seeking forgiveness from Me so that I may forgive him?."' (Sahih al-Bukhari, Hadith Qudsi).

Amr ibn Absah narrated that the Prophet (saw) said: 'The closest any worshipper can be to His Lord is during the last part of the night, so if you can be amongst those who remember Allah at that time, then do so'. (Tirmidhi).

The Prophet (saw) said: 'There is at night an hour, no Muslim happens to be asking Allah any matter of this world or the Hereafter,

except that he will be given it, and this (occurs) every night.' (Muslim)

Between the adhan and iqamah

Anas narrated that Allah's Messenger (saw) said: 'A supplication made between the adhan and iqamah is not rejected.' (Ahmad)

When it is raining

Narrated Sahel Ibn Sa'ad: that the Messenger of Allah (saw) said: 'Two will not be rejected, Supplication when the Adhan (call of prayer) is being called, and at the time of the rain'. (Abu Dawud)

An hour on Friday

Narrated Abu Hurairah: Allah's Messenger (saw) said: 'There is an hour on Friday, and if a Muslim gets it while offering salat and asks something from Allah, then Allah will definitely meet his demand.' And he pointed out the shortness of that particular time with his hands. (Sahih, al-Bukhari). Some have said that this hour is from the time the Imam enters the masjid on Friday's prayer until the prayer is over (i.e. between the two khutbahs). Others have said

that it is the last hour of the day, i.e., after the Asr prayer until the Maghrib prayer.

While drinking Zam zam water

Jaber narrated that Allah's Messenger (saw) said: 'Zam zam water is for what it is drunk for.' (Ahmad). This means that when you drink Zam zam water, you may ask Allah for anything you like to gain or benefit from this water.

Dua during the month of Ramadan

Ramadan is a sacred month in which making plentiful dua is highly encouraged. This can be inferred from the Prophet (saw) saying: "When Ramadan comes, the doors of paradise are opened, and the doors of hell are closed, and the shaitans are locked up." (Sahih al-Bukhari). It is clear that your dua during Ramadan has a greater chance of being accepted.

Dua of the one fasting until he breaks his fast

The Messenger of Allah (saw) said: Three supplications will not be rejected (by Allah), the supplication of the parent for his child, the

supplication of the one who is fasting, and the supplication of the traveller. (Bayhaqi)

The Night Of 'Qadr' (Decree)

This night is the most incredible night of the year. This is the night about which the almighty Allah said, "The night of Al-Qadar (Decree) is better than a thousand months." (97: 3)

The night of decree is one of the odd nights of the last ten nights of the blessed month of Ramadan. The angels descend down to the earth, and the earth is overwhelmed with peace and serenity until the break of dawn, and when the doors of paradise are opened, the worshipper is encouraged to turn to Allah to ask for his needs for this world and the hereafter.

Inshallah, may Allah answer all your duas and give you good in this life and the next. As I said at the start, dua should be your best friend, so use it to strive to achieve your marital goals.

رَبَّنَا هَبْ لَنَا مِنْ أَزْوَاجِنَا وَدُرِّيَّاتِنَا فُرَّةَ أَعْيُنٍ وَاجْعَلْنَا لِلْمُتَّقِينَ إِمَامًا

‘Our Lord! Grant unto us spouses and offspring who will be the comfort of our eyes, and give us (the grace) to lead the righteous.’ (25:74)

رَبِّ إِنِّي لِمَا أَنْزَلْتَ إِلَيَّ مِنْ خَيْرٍ فَقِيرٌ

‘My lord, I am in absolute need of the good You send me’ (28:24)

This is the dua that Sayidina Musa (as) made when he was in Madyan. He (as) had just fled from Egypt and reached the area of Madyan after he had accidentally taken the life of a man and feared that he would be killed by the people he had fled from. SubhanAllah, although he was homeless and hungry, he helped others when he saw they were in trouble. After helping two women water their animals, he retreated under a tree for shade and called to Allah (swt). Allah (swt) accepted his dua and blessed him with a wife, a job and a family in Madyan, and he later became a prophet.

HOW TO FIND A SPOUSE?

On my site www.smartmuslima.com, I have a pre-marriage questionnaire. One of the questions I ask single women is: What is your biggest concern regarding marriage? I've had numerous replies, and the biggest concern women seem to be facing is: how do I find a husband? And where do I find a compatible husband? There is no one size fits all answer to this question because everyone's situation is unique. Nevertheless, there are plenty of 'halal' avenues that Muslims can pursue.

Once upon a time, Muslim communities were pretty tight-knit, especially in the Muslim world. It was easy for parents to find a spouse for their daughter because they would live nearby to extended family, socialise with families from similar backgrounds. They could easily get references because everyone knew everyone, and of course, there were plenty of weddings and other social gatherings to attend where mothers and aunties could point out potential spouses for their kids. For various reasons, which I would love

How to find a spouse?

to go into, but I won't, these networks don't exist for Muslims living in the West, so it has become harder to find suitable spouses.

I will suggest ideas and methods available for you to utilise, and then it's up to you to try them out. Some of them you may think are not for you, and that's fine. But you have to make an effort and don't let the fear of rejection put you off. As the saying goes, "What doesn't kill you makes you stronger" You can grow and learn from even the most negative experiences.

Some of the actions I suggest are part of the Sunnah, and you should follow them not because you want to find a husband but because you want to follow the example of our beloved Prophet (saw). Then, as a by-product, inshallah, maybe you will meet a person - or your future sister in law- who shares your values and is interested in you based on the good qualities they have seen in you.

Be social

Develop good Islamic social skills, akhlaq and adaab. Visit your family and extended family, meet people rather than socialising online. Cultivating an active social life not only makes for a more fulfilling, pleasant life, it also puts you in touch with more people, boosting your chances of meeting someone you're compatible with.

Attend Islamic conferences, gatherings at the local masjid, women's circles etc.

Leave your comfort zone

Are you deeply interested in social justice? Are you an avid book reader? Are you really into charity work? Or maybe you love the outdoors? Explore new hobbies and interests, take classes, learn new skills sign up for volunteering, join a book club etc. Do things that get you out interacting with people. This will pay off immensely in all spheres of your life.

You'll notice that all of these activities take time and effort to develop. In fact, you'll probably never stop working on each of them to some degree, and that's okay. The best way to enhance these areas of your life is to develop healthy habits around them.

And the point isn't to reach perfection in your life where you have a packed social life with hundreds of friends, and then suddenly you find true love. The point is to just work towards being the best version of yourself you can be at any given time. It's good to expand your interests, but as always, follow Allah's guidance and don't be fake. Don't pretend to be someone you are not. Or you will end up attracting the wrong type of person.

Matrimonial services

There are many matrimonial and matchmaking services. Your local masjid might also provide this service. I think the important thing is to do your research. Ask your friends and family if there is a service they would recommend. Don't just believe the reviews you see on a website. Be prepared to pay for the services. Websites, email lists and organising events all cost money.

Matrimonial apps

I don't think there's anything innately wrong with Muslim marriage apps; they are a tool, and it can be a great way to meet a like-minded person. Ensure your wali is involved in the process from the beginning; ask your brother or a male cousin to contact people first to vet unsuitable candidates. From the onset, be bold and clearly communicate what you're looking for: a husband, not a boyfriend. This will cause some people to "ghost" you. And I'm here to tell you that is a good thing. Think about it: the men who freak out when they see the word "wali" are players. It's best to weed them out as swiftly as possible and not play their time-wasting games.

If you tell someone in your first conversation that you're looking for a husband, and it scares them off, then you just did your future

self an enormous favour. If simply stating your honest intentions freaks somebody out, then the truth is that they don't want the same thing as you. Learn to see it as a blessing in disguise when someone doesn't reply to you. Your job is to simply communicate your expectations genuinely and not be ashamed of them.

Married friends and family

Friends can often be an excellent way to meet a potential spouse since they are likely to know both parties and have a sense if they are compatible. The majority of couples I know got married via mutual acquaintances. When friends make these introductions, they should also remember to stay within Islam's boundaries and keep their intentions pure. In marriage situations, it is appropriate to mention both positive and negative traits that may impact the marriage.

Islamic organisations

If you have attended a course or halaqah at an Islamic institute, there is no harm in asking the organisers if they can help you. If you are a student, join your university's Islamic society or Muslim

How to find a spouse?

Student Association. I know it's a cliché, but there is nothing wrong with finding your spouse at your university's Isoc.

*"Our Lord! Grant unto us spouses
and offspring who will be the comfort of our eyes,
and give us (the grace) to lead the righteous."*

(25:74)

HOW CAN LOVE LANGUAGES HELP YOU FIND A COMPATIBLE SPOUSE?

Gary Chapman, PhD, developed the concept of love languages in his book "The 5 Love Languages: The Secret to Love That Lasts", where he describes these five methods of communicating love. Identifying your principal love language and speaking that language frequently to your loved ones will help you create better relationships.

In total, there are five love languages, and Chapman believes everyone has a primary one that will direct how you act in relationships. Understanding a partner's love language is fundamental to the success of a relationship. Dr Chapman writes, "Your emotional love language and the language of your spouse may be as different

as Chinese from English," he says. "No matter how hard you try to express your love in English, if your spouse understands only Chinese, you will never understand how to love each other."

What are the 5 love languages?

They are five different ways of expressing and receiving love:

- Words of affirmation
- Quality time
- Receiving gifts
- Acts of service
- Physical touch

Everyone does not express love in the same way, and likewise, people have different ways to receive love.

Why knowing your love language is useful?

Firstly, learning about love languages can help you understand how you like to receive love and show love. Secondly, it can help you identify if you are compatible with a potential partner as it is a helpful framework to talk about your preferences for affection. For example, some people are more "touchy-feely" than others and enjoy holding hands, cuddles, and public displays of affection.

It is helpful to know whether you and your future fiancé have similar views about how you express love or if your views are poles apart. To find out if you are compatible, you should have conversations about how you both like to be treated.

But conversations just with the man are not enough. Fundamentally, what you are trying to learn is who this person is. You want to get past the persona being presented to you. Who they think you want them to be. It's easy to feel a person is generous and kind if they shower you with gifts and compliments, but a genuinely generous person would do the same for his parents and siblings. So, it's essential to see them in different environments, i.e., at home, how do they show their parents' love? How do they treat their siblings? Then you can compare if they actually appear to be who they say they are. Over time, people will tell you one thing, and their behaviour will show you who they really are. Inshallah, if you like what you see and how they communicate their love, that is a good sign.

Understanding what you value in a relationship will let you evaluate what will make you happy. At the same time, Chapman's system enables you to think about your future partner's needs and in-

terests. Here are the basics about the 5 Love Languages - and how you can tell which is your primary one.

Words of affirmation

People with words of affirmation as a love language cherish verbal acknowledgements of love, including regular "I love you's" positive affirmations via regular communication like texting and social media engagement. These gestures make them feel appreciated and valued.

You will recognise this is your love language if you find these things more meaningful than, say, receiving a gift. If your potential partner frequently expresses their admiration and support verbally, Chapman advises that you try to reciprocate.

Quality time

This love language is about giving your attention to that one particular person without social media distraction. People whose love language is quality time feel the most adored when their partner actively wants to spend time with them. They appreciate active listening, eye contact, their partner's full presence having meaningful conversations, or share recreational activities.

If quality time is your love language, you will be happy when your future spouse takes time for you in their week and pays attention to you. This can be particularly valuable in a relationship if you're both very busy. Making time for one another during the pre-marriage phase is incredibly important. It sets a precedence for the future – but beyond that, the time you take must be spent meaningfully.

If you've noticed that your future partner really values spending time with their family rather than scrolling through Twitter or messaging friends, then that is a good sign. When they show a genuine interest in your life, work, studies etc. and ask you detailed questions, this demonstrates that quality time is one of their love languages.

Acts of service

If your love language is acts of service, you value it when your loved ones do things to make your life easier. Things like taking care of you when you're sick. This love language is preferred by people who believe that actions speak louder than words. They want to be shown how they are valued. Doing the mundane or dif-

difficult chores to make their lives easier or more comfortable is highly cherished.

If this is your love language, these are the things you will find the most rewarding in a relationship. Suppose you're somebody who struggles with expressing love verbally. In that case, you may find that your go-to tactic is to take on a household chore, make an indulgent dinner, or undertake the planning aspect of a trip or upcoming social event.

When you visit your potential spouses home, observe how helpful they are. Subtly ask his mother and sisters what chores he does around the house, i.e. cleaning, laundry, or cooking. Or maybe he prefers to do DIY, shopping or fixing the car. Their answers will speak volumes!

Gifts

You feel over the moon when people give you "visual symbols of love," as Chapman calls it. The symbolic thought behind the item is essential, not the value of the gift. People with this style recognise and value the gift-giving process:

- The careful reflection
- The choice of the gift to represent the relationship

- The emotional benefits from receiving the present

If gifts are your love language, you'll be someone who loves flowers, jewellery and chocolates more than a beautifully written love letter. You will also enjoy buying brilliantly thoughtful gifts for your loved ones.

And remember that giving and accepting gifts isn't about monetary value. As with acts of service, expressing this language is about taking time out of your day to do something considerate for your partner.

Suppose you want a partner who will come home from work with a gorgeous bouquet of flowers. In that case, it's a good idea to find out if the person you are considering thinks that is a great way to express love.

Physical touch

People with physical touch as their love language feel cherished when they receive physical signs of affection. You will see them greeting their parents with kisses and friends with big hugs. Physical touch can be incredibly affirming and serve as a robust emotional connector for people with this love language.

People who show affection through this language feel appreciated when they are hugged, kissed, or cuddled. Physical contact can make a huge difference – not least because it's proven to boost oxytocin levels (the cuddle hormone), which lowers stress and increases trust and bonding. They treasure the feeling of warmth and comfort that comes with physical touch. You know this is your love language if you find yourself preferring physical closeness more than a gift as a form of affection.

As you know, during the pre-marriage phase, Muslim couples don't touch, hug or kiss each other. So, we cannot communicate our feelings through physical touch; however, it is imperative that you feel attracted to the person you want to marry. Having said that, make sure you don't mistake chemistry for compatibility. What do I mean?

When couples date and become physically intimate, they can quickly think they are in love, but really it's lust. Their desires and hormones are clouding their judgement. Whilst they are 'getting to know each other', everything seems incredible and intense their body is flooded with dopamine (the pleasure-seeking hormone), and they become intoxicated by their partner. Just thinking about their partner makes their heart beat faster, and they feel butterflies

in their stomach. The net result is they lose the ability to judge the person objectively. Believing they are compatible based on their feelings and not their mind. Inshallah, you do not want to make that mistake. It's a myth manufactured by liberals that the only way you can honestly know if you are compatible is when you sleep with someone before you get married.

Alhamdulillah, we can see the wisdom behind the prohibition of sleeping with a person before marriage because Allah knows what is best for us.

According to the renowned Andalusian scholar Ibn Hazm, a righteous woman is one who keeps herself away from evils when asked to do so and would not seek excuses to continue to act according to her own whims and fancies. And a bad woman is one who insists on following her own desires and digs out all kinds of excuses to conform to her own wishes. A gentleman is one who does not sit with evil men, who does not act at the bidding of his own Nafs (ego). (www.australianislamiclibrary.org)

There is no correlation between having sex before marriage and long-term happiness. Believing that committing haram will strengthen your future "halal marriage" is irrational. The opposite

is true. Saving physical intimacy for only your husband reinforces your relationship.

Inshallah, I hope learning about the 5 Love Languages helps you think of questions you can ask a potential partner to find out if you are compatible and speak the same love languages. Don't forget that you may not be someone who speaks only one love language and that you and your future partner's languages should overlap.

QUESTIONS TO ASK A POTENTIAL SPOUSE

How do you determine whether someone is the right person for you? What sort of things should you be discussing with or asking your potential spouse in premarital conversations? It is essential to first take the time to understand who you are, your life goals, and what you are looking for in a spouse and in marriage. What kind of life do you want to lead? Once you have a clearer picture of your answers, then try your best to learn about your potential spouse.

You want to ask questions that will help you gauge the person's character. Questions such as: What's your favourite city? Or what's your favourite food or football team will not tell you much about their personality and whether they will make a good husband.

Ask open-ended questions, not questions that can be answered with a yes or no. For example, avoid questions such as: Do you pray? Do you fast during Ramadan? Are you kind to your mother?

Which Muslim man would say no to these questions? Even if he does not do these things, he will still answer yes because he does not want to look bad. He will give you the answers you want to hear. Especially if he finds you attractive.

You may be thinking, I don't want to ask too many 'deep' questions in case I scare a man off. My advice is to not take out a long list and begin bombarding him with a million questions. That could potentially put a person off. No one likes to feel corned! First, choose five questions relating to specific topics that are important to you and help you decide if you want to have a second meeting. Also, listen carefully to his answers and ask follow up questions if you don't understand anything. You also need to be open and ready to answer his questions. If your initial meeting goes well, then ask another five questions relating to other topics in the next meeting.

Here is a list of open-ended questions and conversation starters to ask a potential partner to find out if you are compatible. These questions should be asked face to face, not by text. Body language, tone of voice and facial expressions are just as important as the answers a person gives you. Feel free to adapt them to your specific situation. Obviously, not every question is going to be suitable for

you. Choose questions that you feel comfortable asking (you don't have to ask all of them!), but this list is an excellent place to start.

Personality traits

1. What are the most important values to you?
2. What do you like most about yourself?
3. What do you dislike about yourself?
4. How do you identify yourself culturally?
5. How important is your culture to you?
6. If you could relive one event in your life, what would it be?
7. What is one thing that you should never joke about? It's off-limits?
8. In what area of your life would you say you are most irresponsible? (Keep fit, finances, returning phone calls/emails, etc.?)
9. What skills do you possess that you wish you could be paid for?
10. When are you at your best, and what does your best look like?

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11. When are you at your worst, and what does your worst look like?
12. What is your greatest passion/joy?
13. What is something you secretly believe is indulgent and lavish, but you do it anyway because you enjoy it?
14. What do you do to relax?
15. Which problems are you likely to confront head-on, and which ones are you likely to procrastinate on?
16. What were two major turning points in your life?
17. If money did not matter, what would you do?
18. What is a big mistake you have made in life?
19. What makes you lose your temper?
20. Which 2 people have been the most influential in your development?
21. How do you handle disagreements?

Emotions

1. What is your biggest fear?
2. What are your pet peeves?
3. Do you get angry often? How do you express your anger?
4. How do you react when you get angry? Do you use foul language?

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5. What is the one thing you cannot stand in life?
6. How do you like to express your love to people verbally by gift or by text?
7. If you wrong someone, how do you apologise? Verbally, gift or written apology?
8. When a dispute occurs in your marriage, how should the conflict be resolved?

Islam

1. What is the role of the deen (religion) in your life?
2. What priority does it take?
3. What is something you struggle with within your faith?
4. What do you find the most difficult to follow in Islam?
5. What actions do you feel are inherently wrong? What wouldn't bother you? (Cheating on income tax, littering etc.)
6. Who are the sheikhs/scholars you most often listen to? What are the sources you rely on for Islamic knowledge?
7. Have you done any research about the roles and responsibilities of a husband and wife in Islam?
8. Are you ok with polygamy? Under what circumstances is it acceptable or unacceptable to you?

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9. How important for you is it for your wife to wear hijab?
What about jilbaab?
10. Would you ever take out an interest-based loan for anything (education, house, car, etc.)?
11. If you have non-Muslim family members, what type of relationship do you have with them?
12. How do you like to celebrate Eid?
13. Do you celebrate Valentines Day, Halloween, Thanksgiving, birthdays? Would you attend Easter or Christmas parties? Or a church wedding of a friend?
14. What do you feel like you can improve on in your faith?

Wife

1. What is your understanding of an Islamic marriage?
2. How do you define love?
3. What is your biggest fear about marriage?
4. What is unforgivable before marriage? After marriage?
5. What exactly do you want in a wife?
6. What exactly do you want to avoid in a life partner (honestly and clearly)?
7. What do you not want in your wife?
8. What expectations do you have for your future spouse?

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9. What are the roles of a husband and a wife? Does the wife have to obey the husband?
10. What do you perceive as the ideal husband-wife dynamics?
11. Do you have particular views about the type of profession or career your spouse should have?
12. What is your ideal timeline for marriage and children?
13. To what extent do you expect your wife to consult with you on decisions? If you disagree with something your wife was doing or planning to do, how would you address this?
14. If you fall out with me or are really annoyed with something I did, how would you address it?
15. If I'm unhappy about something you did, how would you want me to approach you?
16. Picture a day in your future marriage. Imagine what each spouse is doing. Who is working outside the home? Who is cooking and cleaning? Who is doing the bedtime routine? Changing nappies etc.?

Finances

1. How is your financial health?
2. How would you get yourself out of a financial predicament?

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3. How would you recover from financial ruin? What does financial ruin mean to you?
4. If you received £25,000, what would you do with it?
5. When you marry, will you have two separate accounts, one joint account, or all three?
6. Would you expect your wife to contribute to household bills?
7. What outstanding debts do you have? How long until you fully pay them off?
8. Are you happy with your career? What would you change, if anything?
9. Would you be happy for your wife to continue with her career after marriage and after kids?
10. How do you save money? How will being married impact your finances?
11. What do you understand about mahr (the marriage gift)?

Goals

1. What is your definition of success?
2. What are you most proud of in your life?
3. What was the biggest obstacle you faced in life, and how has it affected you?

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4. What adventure do you most long to have?
5. Where do you see yourself in 10 years? Any goals you'd like to accomplish?
6. If you pursued further study, did you like what you studied, or did you want to study something else?
7. If you had some extra time to do what you want, what would you do?

Families

1. Where does your family live? How often do you see them?
2. After marriage, would you like to live nearby to your family?
3. Are/were your parent's soul mates?
4. Are you more like your mum or your dad?
5. How does your family identify themselves culturally?
6. What's your favourite childhood memory?
7. What's your worst childhood memory?
8. Who was your favourite relative growing up? Why?
9. Do you think your parents did an excellent job of raising you? Why?
10. What have your parents criticised in the past? Does it still bother you?

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11. Have you ever defied your parents' wishes?
12. What are your parent's expectations of your future wife?
13. How would you make dawah with family members (yours or mine) who are not practising?
14. What is the relationship between you and your family?
15. Who knows you best?
16. Who is the most crucial person in your life?
17. If I asked your parents to describe you in three words, what would they say?
18. What is your expectation of a wife concerning her relationship with your family?
19. What would you expect her to do for your family?
20. What do you expect your relationship to be like with your in-laws?

Parenting

1. Do you want to be a father? How big of a family do you want?
2. What is your biggest fear of parenthood?
3. How much time can/will you dedicate to parenting?
4. What is your emotional remedy for a sick/sad/angry child?

5. What would you do if you and your spouse were pregnant, and an amniocentesis revealed birth defects?
6. What are your views about using baby-sisters, nannies and child-care?
7. Do you believe in sending your children to an Islamic school? If not, what kind of organised Islamic education would you want to give them?

Health

1. Have you experienced any kind of emotional abuse or mistreatment in the past?
2. What have you done to heal from your past?
3. What is your understanding of proper health and mental health, and nutrition?
4. How do you support your own health and nutrition?
5. Do you suffer from any chronic disease or condition?

Friends

1. Describe your friendship group.
2. How do you socialise with your friends?
3. If I asked your closest friends to describe you in three words, what would they say?
4. Can men and women be friends?

5. Can men and women be best friends?
6. Do you think it's ok to continue being friends with the opposite gender after marriage? I.e. going out to eat, watching a movie?
7. Is social media an essential part of your life?
8. What do you expect from your spouse when your friends come over?

Previous Marriages

1. Have you been engaged before? If so, how long ago?
2. Have you been married before?
3. Have you ever been divorced?
4. What is your relationship like with your ex-wife?
5. Do you have kids? What is your relationship like with them?
6. Are you married now?
7. Do you want to practice polygamy?

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Anas ibn Malik narrated the Prophet (saw) said:

*“Great reward comes with great trials.
When Allah loves a people, He tests them,
and whoever accepts it attains His pleasure,
whereas whoever shows discontent
with it incurs His wrath.”*

(Tirmidhi)

HOW TO DEAL WITH DISAPPOINTMENT

You may have been looking for a spouse for a while, and it's easy to begin feeling down in the dumps and pessimistic. Sometimes no reason is given when a proposal is withdrawn or an engagement broken off. Marriage may not be on the horizon even though you have done everything in your control. So how should you deal with your feelings of frustration?

Dear sister, please take comfort in knowing that there is a good reason you are in your current situation, and to be honest, only Allah knows what that good reason is. Allah is All-Knowing, and you are a mere mortal. You can only understand what's in your reality and perception. You cannot know or understand matters beyond your control, and that's because you cannot see the unseen: only Allah can. Things such as a man's honest inner thoughts, his true intentions or his parent's preferences. You can spend hours speculating, but unless you can time travel or mind-read, you will never

know the wisdom behind why things are not working out for you. Inshallah, have patience; Allah reminds us of His wisdom:

"But perhaps you hate a thing, and it is good for you, and perhaps you love a thing, and it is bad for you. And Allah Knows, while you know not." (2:216)

One of Allah's names is Al-Aleem— the All-Knowing: what is and what could be, what was and what could have been. Al-Ghazali says, "Its perfection lies in comprehending everything by knowledge—manifest and hidden, small and large, first and last, inception and outcome."

The colossal contrast between our consciousness and Allah's knowledge is like night and day. We have to acquire ours by what we sense and experience. In contrast, our Creator's understanding has no beginning or end and is not built upon trying things out or learning from our mistakes. Allah (swt) tells us in the Qur'an:

"And with Him are the keys of the unseen; none knows them except Him. And He knows what is on the land and in the sea. Not a leaf falls, but that He knows it. And no grain is there within the darkneses of the earth and no moist or dry [thing] but that it is [written] in a clear record" (6:59)

Allah, Al-Aleem knows every leaf that falls. He knows our inner thoughts.

"And indeed We have created man, and We know whatever thoughts his inner self-development and We are closer to him than (his) jugular vein." (50:16)

So He knows the disappointment you are experiencing. The heartbreak you are enduring. Your Lord does not forget either. Allah knows when you chose not to date or flirt with men for His sake. Don't think that choosing the 'halal' way to find a husband has been a waste of time. Inshallah, continue obeying Allah and doing the right thing, and you will be rewarded in this life and the next, Inshallah!

Your present situation is similar to that of Prophet Musa (as) when he met Al-Khidr. The miraculous story of this fortuitous meeting between Prophet Musa and Al-Khidr is narrated in verses 60-82 of Surah Al-Kahf and addressed in numerous hadith.

One day, Prophet Musa delivered an impressive sermon to Bani Israel (the children of Israel), and all the assembled people who heard it were deeply moved. Someone in the congregation asked him: "O Messenger of Allah, is there another man on earth more learned than you?" Prophet Musa replied: "No!"— thus believing, as

Allah had not only given him the power of miracles and honoured him with the Torah, but He had also granted him the supreme privilege of speaking directly to Him.

In fact, Prophet Muhammad (saw) has indicated that Musa was one of Allah's five greatest prophets and messengers. However, in this instance, Allah admonished Musa and revealed that no man could know all there is to know, nor would one messenger alone be the custodian of all knowledge.

There would always be another with more superior expertise and someone else who knew what others did not. So then, in our Quranic passage, Prophet Musa asked Allah: "O Allah, where is this man? I would like to meet him and learn from him."

Musa also asked for a sign to clarify this person's identity. Allah informed Musa that he would find this wise man at the junction of the two seas. Allah instructed him to take a live fish in a water-filled vessel, and where the fish disappeared, there he would find the man he sought.

Musa set out on his journey, accompanied by a young apprentice, Yusha bin Nun, who carried the vessel with the fish. When they reached the two seas' junction, they were exhausted from the long journey and stopped to rest. As they slept, the fish moved vigor-

ously in the vessel and jumped out and fell into a channel leading to the sea. It made its way out to the sea through a passage fashioned from the motion of the pathway it took. It is said that Allah stopped the flow of water on both sides of the way created by the fish so that there became something like an archway or tunnel. At the time, Prophet Musa's companion neglected to tell him that their fish had escaped. When they woke up refreshed, they recommenced their journey. Thus, they had passed on from the place where Prophet Musa would have encountered Al-Khidr.

Later on, in their journey, exhausted and hungry, Musa asked his boy-servant to bring forth their meal for them to partake of it, satisfy their hunger, and feel refreshed. Yusha bin Nun then recalled what had occurred at their previous rest stop and acknowledged that when they had taken an interlude of rest at the rock, he had forgotten about the fish, and none but the Shaytan had made him forget this incident.

So they retraced their steps, and upon coming to the designated place, it is said, they were amazed to behold a great tunnel fashioned out of the water. Musa realised that this was the sign by which they were to discover Al-Khidr. Indeed, there they found a

man covered by a garment. This was Al-Khidr, the sage whom Allah had ordained for Prophet Musa to meet.

The name Al-Khidr literally means 'The Green One.' It was a title derived from the word khadra, which translates to 'green.' It was said that Al-Khidr had the exceptional prowess to turn withered, barren land into fertile, productive, green land. Al-Khidr is believed by scholars to have been an angel or a prophet, with many scholars leaning towards the latter assumption. They state that since he followed the divine ordainments commanded by Almighty Allah, he was probably a prophet.

Prophet Musa approached him and greeted him. Al-Khidr asked, "Is there such a greeting in your land? Who are you?"

Prophet Musa said, "I am Musa."

He said, "Are you Musa the Prophet of Allah, the Musa of the Children of Israel?"

Prophet Musa said, "Yes," and added, "I have come to you so that you may teach me something of that knowledge which you have been taught." In this way, Prophet Musa beseeched Al-Khidr to teach him the Higher Truth that Allah had granted him, as he hoped to be guided by this supreme knowledge to perform beneficial and righteous deeds.

Al-Khidr said, "O Musa! I have some of Allah's knowledge which He has bestowed upon me but which you do not know; and you too, have some of Allah's knowledge which He has bestowed upon you, but which I do not know. Each of us has responsibilities before Allah that the other does not share. But you will not be able to have patience with me. You will not be able to accompany me when you see me execute actions that go against your better judgment. For how can you have patience about a thing you know not? I know you may justifiably denounce me, but my knowledge has been bestowed on me by Allah, and there are hidden interests in my actions, which you may not perceive."

Having stated the above, Al-Khidr agreed to allow Prophet Musa to accompany him –on certain conditions. He extracted a promise from Prophet Musa that he should persevere by being patient and obedient and refrain from questioning him about the reason behind any of the actions he was about to observe or encounter.

Al-Khidr emphasised that Prophet Musa should not ask him about whatever he might find distasteful until he initiated the discussion and offered an explanation. Prophet Musa vowed to be forbearing and practice restraint and self-control when confronted by any actions or decisions taken by Al-Khidr, expressing assent

that all would be revealed to him by the end of the journey. Based on this understanding, the two proceeded upon their eventful journey.

It is said that Musa and Al-Khidr set out walking on the seashore. A boat sailed by, and they requested the crew of the vessel to take them on board. The sailors recognised Al-Khidr and welcomed them warmly. They would be honoured to have Al-Khidr as their prestigious passenger, and they agreed to take both him and Prophet Musa to their destination without any fare. When they were on board the boat, a sparrow came and stood on the edge of the boat and dipped its beak once or twice into the sea. Al-Khidr said to Musa: "O Musa! My knowledge and your knowledge have not decreased Allah's knowledge except as much as this sparrow has decreased the water of the sea with its beak." Then unexpectedly, Al-Khidr took an adze and pulled up a plank that disabled the boat. Soon afterwards, he roughly patched it up again.

Musa was shocked and could not restrain himself from proclaiming: "What have you done? These people took us on board, charging us nothing, yet you have intentionally scuttled their boat to drown its passengers. Verily, you have done a dreadful thing." Al-Khidr replied: "Did I not tell you that you would not be able to re-

main patient with me?" Musa was immediately regretful and replied: "Call me not to account for what I have forgotten, and do not be hard upon me for my fault." Prophet Musa realised the error he had committed and the forgetfulness that had befallen him, which had prompted him to commit this mistake, so he pleaded with Al-Khidr not to let his outspokenness make Al-Khidr exclude him from the honour of being allowed to accompany him further.

Then, it is said, the two disembarked from the boat, and while they were traversing the shore, they observed a young boy playing with other boys. He was the finest and most handsome of all the boys. Al-Khidr singled him out, and without provocation, he took the boy away and slaughtered him. When he observed this, Prophet Musa was appalled and horrified. He perceived the killing as unjustified, so he confronted Al-Khidr, "Have you slain an innocent person who had slain none? Truly a foul (unheard of) thing have you done!"

By Prophet Musa's standard, this was a heinous act, both prohibited and evil. Al-Khidr reprimanded him and reiterated that he had correctly assumed earlier that Prophet Musa would have no patience with him. Upon hearing this, Prophet Musa was ashamed and realised that he had violated his trust with Al-Khidr. Musa re-

alised that he must refrain from arguing and further questioning, or he would undoubtedly be deprived of any further knowledge and benefit to be derived from this wise one. He fervently pleaded, "If I ask thee anything after this, keep me not in your company, after which you will have received an excuse for sending me away."

Continuing upon their arduous journey, they chanced upon a village. Here the two travellers requested food and shelter. As per the custom of the day, wayfarers should be welcomed into the fold of any dwelling or town they passed through, and the inhabitants were to be honoured with the provision of sustenance and a resting place. However, the people of this village rejected the universal rule of hospitality towards strangers. Their manners were not only devoid of any basic courtesy but also proved to be highly churlish in their outright refusal to offer sustenance in any form to their guests.

Upon departing from the village, the two came upon a wall on the point of collapse. To Prophet Musa's utter surprise, Al-Khidr proceeded to repair the crumbling wall and fortified it by setting it upright again. Prophet Musa was unable to contain his anger. He was outraged that Al-Khidr had rewarded these rude and arrogant people by assisting them. The least he could have done was to ask

for compensation for a job done so that with the money gained from this job, they could have purchased some nourishment for themselves.

At this point, Al-Khidr said: "You agreed after the boy was killed that if you asked me any explanation after that, you would not accompany me any further. So this is the parting of the ways between you and me." A hadith states that Prophet Muhammad at this point said, May Allah bestow His mercy on Musa! Had he remained patient, Allah might have told us more about their story.

Al-Khidr was now ready to explain the cause of all these seemingly senseless and impulsive acts, and what had prompted him to do as he had done:

- As for the boat, he explained, it belonged to poor people working on the sea. And because there was an oppressive, tyrannical king who was seizing every ship by force, Al-Khidr wished to save the boat by inflicting a defect on it, as that action would ultimately save their source of livelihood.
- As for the boy killed without provocation, his fated rebellious nature and arrogance, known to Al-Khidr, would otherwise have led his righteous parents not only away from the true faith but also towards disbelief and sin due to their

love for him. Al-Khidr knew that Allah would bless them with a child who would be purer, more righteous, and merciful, worthy of them.

- The wall belonged to two orphan boys in the town, and there was a treasure belonging to them under it. Their father had been a pious, virtuous man, and they were entitled to these riches. Allah intended that they should attain their age of full strength and take out their treasure as mercy and favour from Him.

These were Al-Khidr's interpretations of those (things) over which Prophet Musa could not be patient.

Al-Khidr said that he had done none of these actions on his own initiative or on his own authority. He declared that though they appeared to Prophet Musa questionable and random, inexplicable and unjust, and perhaps even cruel, they were done under divine guidance in all three cases. Allah had prevailed upon him to perform the acts for a definite reason. He concluded by saying, "Such is the interpretation of those things over which you were unable to hold patience."

There are countless lessons you can gain from this narration. Firstly, my dear sister, please remember Allah is al-Mujeeb (the

One who responds), and al-Fattah (the Supreme Opener) and al-Wakeel (the Trustee). Therefore, continue tying your camel and trusting in Allah.

Anas ibn Malik reported: A man said, "O Messenger of Allah, should I tie my camel and trust in Allah, or should I leave her untied and trust in Allah?" The Prophet (saw) said, "Tie her and trust in Allah." (Tirmidhi)

Allah knows you are trying your best and praying even harder to find a compatible husband. So, have absolute certainty that Allah will aid you in your marriage journey, and if you are meant to get married: you will. All Allah has to say is "Be" and it will happen. Without a doubt all praise is due to Allah!

Allah has not given you your husband yet (and there is a possibility you may never get married) because He knows what is best for your dunya (this life) and your akhirah (the hereafter). He is the Most-Wise, and He is the All-Knowing. We sometimes think we are super smart, but as the example of Prophet Musa illustrated, our knowledge is just a drop in the ocean. Acknowledging that Allah knows precisely what is best for us is true tawakul, complete trust in God.

Inshallah, if you can have patience whilst dealing with the disappointments you face, the rewards for you will be immense in this life and the next. The Prophet (saw) said:

“How wonderful is the affair of the believer, for his affairs are all good, and this applies to no one but the believer. If something good happens to him, he is thankful for it and that is good for him. If something bad happens to him, he bears it with patience and that is good for him.” (Muslim).

It was narrated from Anas ibn Malik that the Prophet (saw) said: “Great reward comes with great trials. When Allah loves a people, He tests them, and whoever accepts it attains His pleasure, whereas whoever shows discontent with it incurs His wrath.” (Tirmidhi)

Inshallah, I sincerely pray the advice in this book helps you. Choosing a compatible husband is a long-term investment. Take the time to make the correct decision and follow Allah's guidance, not popular culture. Trust in Allah; He knows what is best for you.

Inshallah, if you would like more advice, you will find *The Pre-Marriage Course for Muslims* extremely useful.

Whether you are engaged or just beginning to consider marriage, this course will inshallah help.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Farhat Amin Farhat Amin is an author & host of the podcast, her books include Smart Teenage Muslimah, Smart Single Muslimah, Hands Off Our Hijab and Child Loss, Bereavement & Hope. She has delivered lectures & courses on Women in Islam and feminism. She shares life advice that is Islamic and honest thought-provoking via her website www.smartmuslima.com. Where you can enrol in her Pre-marriage Course For Muslims, and Sex Education for Muslimahs.

Her aim is to help women achieve confidence in their faith. The inspiration for both her website and podcast is Surah Asr:

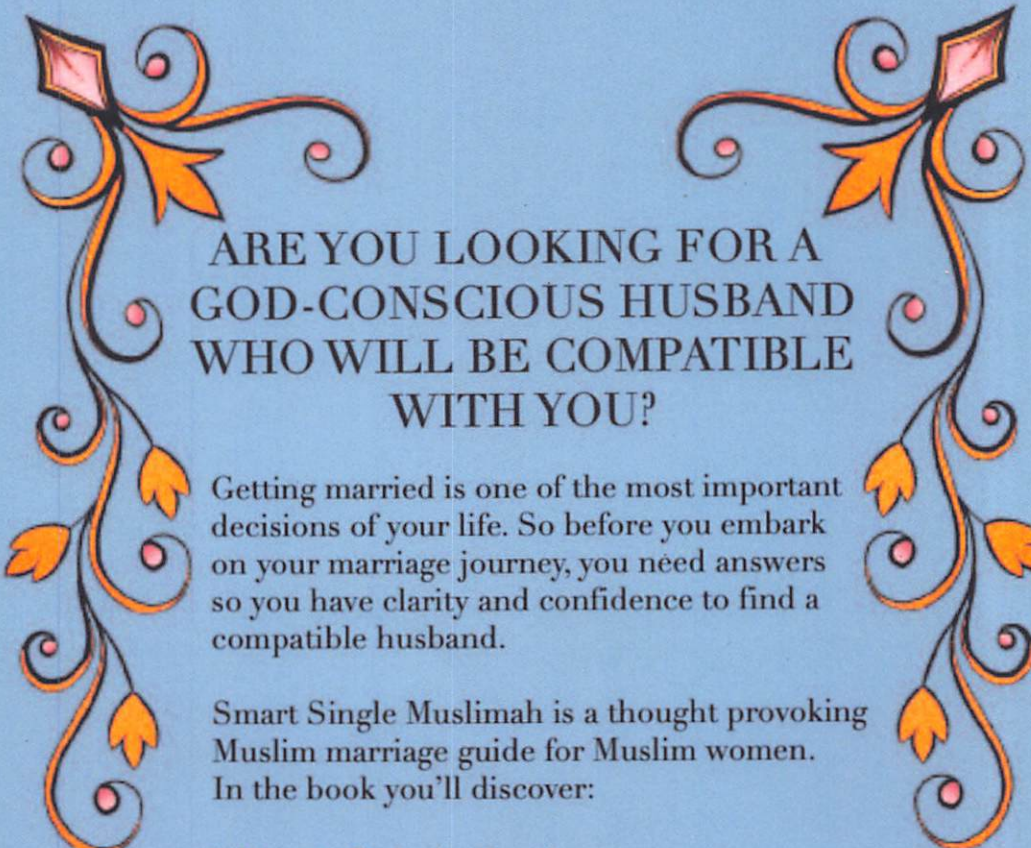
"By Time. The human being is in loss. Except those who believe, and do good works, and encourage truth, and recommend patience."

She felt there was a need for a platform that represents Muslim women without falling into the temptation of watering down Islam for the sake of mass appeal. As Islam encourages hikmah (wisdom) when informing others of Islam, not compromise.

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ARE YOU LOOKING FOR A GOD-CONSCIOUS HUSBAND WHO WILL BE COMPATIBLE WITH YOU?

Getting married is one of the most important decisions of your life. So before you embark on your marriage journey, you need answers so you have clarity and confidence to find a compatible husband.

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