

Premarital Counseling Guidance for Newlyweds



Rishta Nata
United States of America



GUIDANCE FOR NEWLYWEDS

Hazrat Khalīfatul Masīḥ V (may Allah be his Helper) has expressed the desire that all couples intending to get married be counseled and made aware of potential challenges in a new marriage. It is good to be aware of common pitfalls and possible areas of conflict that can disrupt or destroy a marriage. Remember: **“forewarned is forearmed.”**

The US Rishtā Nata department has put together this document to help guide the newlywed couple and their parents through the marriage process and to preempt potential problems in a new marriage. The material will be presented in the following sections:

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I. Guidelines and Instructions for Nīkāh in the USA Jama‘at

Taqwa (love of God and the fear of losing His love) is the basis of Islamic marriage and mentioned 5 times in the Khutba Nīkāh (Sermon of Nikah). A marriage cannot be successful without prayer. All parties should pray sincerely before, during and with each step of the marriage process. Nīkāh is a contract between two individuals and the Nīkāh form should be reviewed and filled out properly.

Below is a comprehensive list of what needs to be done in order to have a Nīkāh solemnized within the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community, USA. **It is very important that all these steps are completed in the order given below:**

1. **Have a civil/court marriage performed and obtain the marriage license.** If there is a legitimate reason why the civil marriage cannot be performed before the Nīkāh, written approval should be obtained from the Amir USA, confirming that the Nīkāh may be performed prior to the civil marriage. This approval note should be submitted with the completed Nikah forms to the Headquarters.
2. **Four copies of the Nīkāh form are needed** – all signatures should be original on all four copies (photocopies of signatures are not acceptable). The marriage certificate and divorce papers (if applicable) should be attached to each form - therefore four copies of all the supporting documents are required.
3. Effective January 1, 2015, both the bride and bridegroom must complete the “Binding Arbitration Agreement” and have this form notarized.
4. **The bride and her guardian (“wali”)** should complete the bride section of the Nīkāh forms and have witnesses (two adults) sign the forms.
5. **The President of the bride’s Jamā‘at** should complete the bride section of the forms and sign with a stamp.
6. **The bridegroom** should complete the bridegroom section of the Nīkāh forms and have witnesses (two adults) sign the forms.
7. **The President of the bridegroom’s Jamā‘at** should complete the bridegroom section of the forms and sign with a stamp.
8. **If the bride or bridegroom is outside the USA,** Amir Sahib will have to sign the form as well.

9. The completed forms should be provided to the Missionary who is authorized to perform the Nīkāh. If a Missionary is not available to perform the Nīkāh, written approval is needed from the Amir USA for any Jama'at President, or another person, to perform the Nīkāh. This approval note should be submitted with the completed Nīkāh forms to the Headquarters.
10. **After the Nīkāh is announced**, two adult witnesses should provide the required information on the witness section on page 4 and sign all forms (all four of them!).
11. **The Missionary, or the person approved to perform the Nīkāh**, will submit all four forms to the National Headquarters (Attention: General Secretary Office, Ahmadiyya Movement in Islam, 15000 Good Hope Rd., Silver Spring, MD 20905).
12. **The National Headquarters registers the Nīkāh** and sends two copies back to the person who submitted the forms. This person then provides one copy each to the bride and groom for their records.

Sufficient time should be allowed for the Nīkāh paperwork to be completed fully and accurately; **the Jamā'at President should not be presented with Nīkāh forms at the last minute.**

Consent for Marriage

- Are both parties happy with the Nīkāh?
- Is any party being forced to agree to marry against their will?
- The bride must give her consent with full freedom and without any pressure from anyone.
- The Nīkāh cannot proceed without the consent of the wali (legal guardian) of the bride.

(Reference: A girl came to the Holy Prophet pbuh and said: 'My father married me to his brother's son so that he might raise his status thereby.' The Prophet gave her the choice, and she said: 'I approve of what my father did, but I wanted women to know that their fathers have no right to do that.' Ibn Majah, Nasai)

Haq Mahr

- Haq Mahr is an integral part of Islamic marriage and announced at the time of Nīkāh.
- The amount of the Haq Mahr should be agreed upon by both sides.
- Haq Mahr inflated for family prestige (with an assurance from the bride's side that it will actually never be claimed) is not permissible.

- The bridegroom has to pay the Haq Mahr to his wife as soon as possible and it is her right to receive it. This right cannot be denied except under special circumstances by the Qazā'. It may, however, be waived by the wife on a purely voluntary basis later on. **This waiver should be documented and witnessed by an adult – better yet, have this waiver notarized. Payment of Haq Mahr to wife should be documented and witnessed/notarized.**
- According to Hazrat Musleh Mau'ūd (may Allah be pleased with him), the Haq Mahr should equal the bridegroom's current income of six months to one year.

(Reference: "And give the women their dowries willingly." The Holy Quran, 4:5)

Jewelry given at time of Nīkāh

Jewelry given at the time of Nīkāh can be considered part of the Haq Mahr and recorded as such on the Nikah form. If a marriage breaks down, these items are part of the Haq Mahr. Once a marriage is established, such jewelry becomes the asset of the wife.

Marriage Gifts

Additional jewelry, clothes and other items given at the time of marriage are gifts and become the property of the one who receives them. If a marriage breaks down, there should be no expectation that gifts will be returned. The Holy Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be on him) has likened taking back a gift to eating one's own vomit.

(Reference: "And if you desire to take one wife in place of another and you have given one of them a treasure, take not aught therefrom. Will you take it by lying and with manifest sinfulness?" Holy Quran, 4:21)

Dowry

This is what the bride brings with her to the new home. When the Holy Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be on him) arranged the marriage of his daughter, Hazrat Fāṭima (may Allah be pleased with her), he gave her a dowry of some kitchen utensils and bedding. This establishes broad parameters for us. The dowry should be **"within means and within reason"**. There should be absolutely no pressure or expectation otherwise from the groom's side. The dowry must be completely voluntary and not offered to impress others. Both sides should be comfortable with the size and content of the dowry.

The dowry should not be extravagant based upon any notion of the bride's parents that they cannot trust their son-in-law to provide adequately for their daughter. Some marriages break down later, when the son-in-law feels that he is being considered incapable of providing for his family.

If the bride's family is unable to provide a dowry because of financial difficulties, coming from abroad, or for any other reason, it should be understood and accepted sincerely by the bridegroom's

family up front. It will be unwise to proceed with the marriage if it may be a point of contention later on.

The Wedding

According to Sunnah, weddings and all related events should be simple and the focus should be on prayers rather than ostentation. During the life of the Holy Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be on him), weddings were celebrated with a simple Nīkāh ceremony followed by celebration of Walima.

(Reference: The Holy Prophet (pbuh) said, "Hold a wedding feast (Walima), even if only with a sheep." Sahih Bukhari and Multsim)

The Honeymoon

This is not a part of the Islamic marriage process per se. However, it may be helpful in allowing the new couple to spend quality time together early on, assuming finances permit. If so, an itinerary should be chalked out in advance and not kept as a last minute surprise. If the couple cannot afford to go away, it should be so mentioned at the outset. Lack of clarity on this and on similar issues only serves to fuel disputes in the future. For example, if going abroad, it should be checked if passports and vaccinations are valid and current. The bridegroom should not expect the bride to have anticipated it if she didn't even know the honeymoon was going to be abroad.

If the bride or bridegroom is arriving from a different country

Coming from another country can pose additional challenges to both the bride and bridegroom. They may not be familiar with the customs and practices in the other country. This may include, but not limited to, language, food, clothing, education, job possibilities, driving/traffic, currency and sports etc. The couple and their families should be aware of these challenges and prepare for it as much as possible.

If the bridegroom arrives from another country, he should be guided on possible career options, degree equivalencies etc. Helping him to adjust to the new environment and simultaneously to his new role as the breadwinner is of paramount importance. An effort should be made to make his new family independent by having separate accommodations as soon as possible and let them make their own decisions to establish themselves as a family.

II. The Couple's Residence – living with in-laws

(Reference: Huzoor (aba) said, "Then, Islam has also given the right of a separate house to women. People raise some objections to this. In today's society – whether it is Asian, Pakistani or Indian societies – disputes arise due to the girl living in the same house as her in-laws and as a result of petty quarrels arising between them. These then escalate to disagreements between the husband and wife, which then leads to separation. The wife has the right to express her desire to live separately [from her in-laws] and only aside from extremely compelling circumstances are men told to fulfil this request. A girl should not be forced to live with her in-laws. If financial means permit, then the husband and wife should move out. And if they are financially unable to move out, then they should try so that whenever they are financially able, they may move." Jalsa Salana UK 2021)

Typically, the bride moves into the bridegroom's home, and not the other way around. Exceptions do occur but that is only by mutual agreement. If it is planned that the bride will live with the bridegroom's parents and that would be the residence for the newly-weds, **there must not be any ambiguity about this.**

Is there an understanding that the new couple will live in the parents' home for a specified period of time? If not, then it should be made clear at the outset whether the arrangement is for a finite period or long term. **Both parties must be very clear and accepting about it.**

New family dynamics

For the first few days, the new bride is a guest in the home and should be very well looked after. Everyone should be welcoming her to the household. She has just left the coziness of her own home and will probably be homesick. She might have feelings of sadness and may pine for her parents, friends, etc. This should be fully understood and sympathized with. Lack of understanding at this stage could mark out the in-laws as being harsh, hard and without sympathy. The husband has a very crucial role in this early period. He should be understanding and support his wife in this transition.

Marriage ceremonies and post marital setup varies according to traditions and cultural practices. It is traditional in South Asian culture, that the bride dresses up for several days after marriage. Clothes and jewelry, especially those given as gifts by the in-laws take on a particular significance. In order to build a strong relationship, the bride may have to live up to her new family's expectations. She may have to take care of her appearance and join others fully dressed in the mornings. It is good manners to appreciate gifts provided by in-laws. In order to show gratitude, it is customary that the bride wear the dress provided by her mother-in-law, even if it is not to her liking. It is not always possible for the other side to have anticipated one's likes and preferences.

They have tried their best and provided gifts out of love. Not being appreciative may be construed as ingratitude and disregard for the in-laws and may start the marriage with a bad impression. The parents and family of the bridegroom will also need to be patient and allow some time to understand the likes and dislikes of the new member of their family and be respectful of that.

The bridegroom should be equally courteous to his in-laws and show appreciation of gifts given to him.

Building a relationship with the in-laws

The bride is expected to show respect and deference to her mother-in-law and father-in-law. The bridegroom is also expected to treat his mother-in-law and father-in-law with respect, just as he does his own parents. Both are also expected to show tolerance and respect to the siblings of their spouse.

The new couple must make every effort to remember that their spouse's family is now their own. They should not consider their in-laws as strangers, outsiders, or as people to be opposed. They should welcome their in-laws into their own lives and treat them as they would treat their own family: with love and respect. They should endeavor to become friends with their spouse's siblings and develop a parent-child relationship with their spouse's parents. They should treat their in-laws as they would want their spouse to treat their own parents. Only then can a respectful and peaceful situation be established with one's in-laws.

The parents may feel a sense of loss as their child (son or daughter) now starts to live with another person. This is understandable and should be understood by the new couple. The best way to get rid of this feeling is to become part of the new family. This is important for both sides.

The new relationships can have new challenges as well. Mother and sisters of the husband may have difficulty adjusting to this new relationship and may cause some strain on the family dynamics. The best way to deal with this is to ignore it as much as possible, and try to befriend them. The husband's sisters should be thought of as one's own sisters, and treated as such.

In addition, there may be differences in certain types of decisions made by various members of the new family. For example, the mother-in-law may make all the decisions in one household, or the father-in-law or eldest son, etc. Both sides are advised to learn about this in the early days, and then try to respect new family dynamics. Each family is used to their own way of living and dealing with things. The new couple should be mindful of this and respect each other's family's way of doing things, no matter how different it may be from their own. They should not be in a hurry to impose their own ideas or values. One should not pass comments or joke about the habits, practices and traditions of others.

When it comes to modesty within the in-laws' home, both the bride and the bridegroom should maintain it assiduously where required (e.g., a daughter-in-law in front of her husband's father or brothers, or a husband to his wife's sisters).

Expectation of household duties

The bride should not be expected to do household chores immediately after marriage. Later, any household duties should be allocated fairly so that all able-bodied household members participate in the upkeep of the house. This should be done after discussion rather than an authoritative instruction from one person to the other. Remember that there is going to be a process of gradual assimilation into the bridegroom's family and not a forced induction. The new bride is not meant to come in as a servant.

In order to avoid unnecessary embarrassment after marriage, it should be made clear to the bridegroom and his parents if the bride has not yet learned how to cook. Obviously, if she cannot, she should not be expected to prepare full meals on her own immediately after marriage. She may need gentle guidance from her mother-in-law. It should be ascertained beforehand how much skill she currently has, how much she will learn before the marriage. It is important that boys and girls learn usual household activities including cooking, in the parent's homes. These skills will be very useful after marriage in managing the household.

Other important matters of a practical nature, which should be addressed include:

- After settling in with the in-laws, what is expected of the daughter-in-law - household chores, cooking, keeping the house clean, etc.?
- Are both sides happy and comfortable with their expected roles?
- Is there a sick and elderly parent that the new bride will be expected to look after – as a nurse perhaps? What is expected of the new son-in-law – going to work, helping with household chores, etc.?
- Will he be expected to provide support for his wife's family if they are in distress or unexpected tragedy befalls them?
- Does the bride wish to or plans to work outside of home? If so, this needs to be discussed beforehand and made clear to the bridegroom and his family. Household responsibilities may have to be adjusted based on her time in the house.

Responsibilities of parents

It is the responsibility of the bridegroom's parents to provide love and comfort to the bride, who has left her home to join a new family and new environment. The parents should not try to impose

their authority by trying to control everything. Instead, try to gain her confidence, trust and respect. Once this is achieved, common ground can then be reached effortlessly in a relaxed environment. The mother-in-law should treat her daughter-in-law as she would want her own daughter to be treated. In the same way, the daughter-in-law should treat her mother-in-law as she would treat her own mother.

Discussing marital discord, Huzoor (may Allah be his Helper) stated in his Friday sermon of November 10, 2006, that both men and women should self-reflect. In addition, in-laws on both sides should self-reflect for it could be the fault of either side, although usually it is the male side that commits the excesses. Huzoor (may Allah be his Helper) said that on his instructions, Amīr Sahib, UK carried out a survey, which informed us that the rate of incidents of culpability amongst men is three times that of women, whereas in 30-40% of cases, it is the in-laws who create the friction. If similar surveys were carried out in the USA or Canada, a similar picture would emerge. The verbal aggression of the in-laws sometimes drives the girl to go back to her parents in estrangement. Even though it is wrong of her to do so, it is the man's responsibility that, while he respects his parents, he should also look after his wife.

In his Friday sermon of May 30, 2003, Huzoor (may Allah be his Helper) described how an issue brought to the Jama'at's attention by some new brides relates to family life. They state that they have had to endure cruelty and injustice from their in-laws and husbands. At times, the new bride is not informed of her new husband's temper and behavior issues, or is told in a hidden manner in such a way that the wife and her parents are led to believe that the issues are not a big deal. At times, verbal and physical abuse results. It has been observed that generally the husband wants to live in peace and harmony with his new wife, but the mother-in-law or sister-in-law are being harsh or are inciting him to be cruel to his wife. In such cases, the poor wife is left with only two choices: either to opt for separation, or to live in such cruelty for the rest of her life. Furthermore, it has also been seen that when such wrongs are committed against the new bride, she, in turn, wrongs the mother-in-law when she is given authority as a daughter-in-law. And thus begins a satanic cycle that goes on and on in families lacking righteousness. This all occurs despite both parties having received the teaching of righteousness and truthfulness in the verses of the Holy Qur'an included in the Nikāh sermon. These verses promote the establishment of paradise on earth and an atmosphere to which even strangers are attracted. Such harsh cases are very few in number – yet they are very distressing and painful... May Allah enable every Ahmadi home, every husband and wife, mother and daughter in-law, sister-in-law and brother to tread along the path of righteousness, and to establish a beautiful society!

It should be noted that Hazrat Khalīfatul Masīḥ V (May Allah be his Helper) has advised that if conflicts are arising for the couple due to living with the extended family, then the parents should be supportive of the couple separating and living on their own.

III. The Couple's Residence - living alone

(Reference: "Men are appointed guardians over women, because of that in respect of which Allah has made some of them excel others, and because the men spend of their wealth." Holy Quran, 4:35)

If there is an agreement or understanding that the couple's residence will be independent and separate from the parents' home, what are the expectations about furnishing it, or "setting it up"? There should be no pressure applied against this by one side or the other. Does any side feel undue pressure exerted upon them? Are they comfortable about this and accept it, or would they like this resolved before the wedding proceeds?

The following tips are more relevant to the new bride who, if she is not working outside the home, may be alone in the home for long periods of time. She should be prepared for a life, which will be markedly different from what she may be used to. When the husband has gone away to work, it can suddenly become very lonely, and depression can set in. It is advisable for the bride to avoid brooding on her own, spending too much time on the internet or on the phone, sleeping excessively and neglecting herself and her home.

When alone, she needs to occupy her time by:

- Making a daily schedule of work around the house.
- Keeping busy doing things which are or will be useful in future (like taking up a course of study).
- Making friends with people she knows her husband will approve of – never with those she is sure he will object to. This applies both ways: both sides owe it to each other. (i.e., find friends of their own gender)
- Calling her family from time to time to inform them of her well being and seeking their best wishes. Be in frequent contact with both sets of parents. Encourage each other to do so. It reassures everyone.
- Improving her religious knowledge by reading the books of the Promised Messiah (peace be on him). This is in anticipation of her setting a good example for children in the future.

Assignment of household duties

- Agree on how the household should be run. Who is responsible for grocery shopping and day-to-day running of the household? Normally this falls in the realm of the lady of the house, but there is no hard and fast rule about this and may depend to some extent on whether she is working outside the home or not, full-time or part-time. Whatever is agreed upon, both sides should be content and comfortable with the arrangement.

- If the lady of the house is going to manage household finances, it is important for both parties to agree on what is a fair sum of money to be provided every week or month to ensure this task is carried out. There should always be provision for this to be reviewed at intervals to ensure the figure is reasonable.
- It should be discussed who will pay the rent and utility bills, phone and internet bills, gas for the car, insurances, etc.

(Reference: The Holy Prophet (pbuh) said, "a man is a guardian of his family and responsible (for them); a wife is a guardian of her husband's house and she is responsible (for it)" Bukhari and Muslim)

Suggested daily household routine

As discussed above, household chores can be divided with mutual agreement. However for stay at home wife it will be helpful if she:

- Establish a daily household routine and follow it.
- Get up and have breakfast together. By preparing and joining the husband for breakfast will give more time together at the beginning of the day. If he is used to it, consider helping with preparing packed lunch before he leaves.
- Various household chores such as cooking, preparing meals, laundry etc. can be mutually distributed. However, if the wife is staying home, she may have to take up more of these tasks.
- Dinner is an important time for bonding. If the wife knows how to cook, she can prepare meals pleasing to both and make sure arrangements are made to have dinner together.
- It may be a good idea to go through the routine of the day, vacuuming, laundry, cleaning, cooking etc., while the husband is at work, rather than waiting until he comes home.
- Make sure that she is ready and properly dressed when he comes home. Many husbands are put off when they come home to a wife who is still in her pajamas!
- Wife would want to see her husband appear well groomed while at home as well.
- Unless essential, avoid being on the telephone/texting with family and friends at the time when he is coming in from work
- By the same token, the husband needs to be mindful of his wife's needs and try his best to participate in household chores and show appreciation for activities she has performed.
- Upon return from work he should make it a point to meet and greet his wife with love and try to listen to what she has to say about the day.
- Unless essential, the husband should avoid going to the computer/phone as soon as he comes home. Both parties should give due attention to making time for one another first.

(Reference: Hadrat Aisha (ra) was asked, "What did the Prophet (pbuh) use to do in his house?" She replied, "He used to keep himself busy serving his family and when it was the time for prayer he would go for it." Sahih Bukhari)

Financial matters

Conflicts about financial issues are fairly common in marriage breakdowns. It is wise to ensure that this aspect is handled with sensitivity and fairness. Both sides should agree on how money is to be spent over and above the usual household expenses. Sometimes the husband may have committed to supporting relatives financially, and this should be clearly understood. If the husband is the sole breadwinner, it is not the wife's call for him to support her side of the family from his income (over which he will have greater say and control).

If there is a substantial portion of the husband's income that will be going outside the use of the married couple and the household budget, then it is important to disclose this before marriage.

Although the husband may have financial responsibilities in relation to his parents or siblings, he has to understand that his primary obligation is spending on his wife and children.

Pocket money

The wife must be provided with a reasonable amount of pocket money for personal use over and above household expenses.

It is a good idea to keep a written account of, or to record online, all expenses, large or small, especially for the first year after marriage. This will provide an idea of one another's spending habits and should help to keep finances balanced.

It must not be forgotten that in Islam, what a man earns is common to both husband and wife, but **what a wife earns belongs to her to spend as she chooses.** The wife's income should not be eyed by the husband. Nor should she be coerced or cajoled into giving the husband her income. Husbands who try to hold back household expenses in the belief that the wife should also contribute are in the wrong. Any household contribution from the wife's income must be completely voluntary. It is reasonable to have the working wife shoulder childcare expenses.

Holidays/Recreation and Family Time versus Finances

Marriage is expensive, and it is perhaps unfair to expect another holiday after the honeymoon in the first year. However, this is not a hard and fast rule. Look at the finances of the home before demanding or expecting a holiday. Also, look at what is affordable and reasonable. A good holiday

brings the couple together and rejuvenates them. A holiday taken under pressure does nobody any good.

Visiting relatives

If the couple's families live at some distance, frequency of trips to visit them need to be discussed with sensitivity and balance vis-à-vis the financial aspect and the amount of time spent with each family. It is good practice to visit both sets of parents regularly. Both have rights and it is important to build mutual confidence if these rights are maintained and upheld.

Balancing work and household duties

The prime responsibility for managing the household lies with the wife. If she is working outside the home then the workload has to be shared between the husband and wife with mutual respect and understanding and not by enforcement. Tasks should be decided upon mutually and a conscious plan should be made ahead of time to clarify both the husband and wife's duties and responsibilities.

Prepare a weekly calendar each weekend for the upcoming week and identify who is cooking, doing groceries, errands, household chores, etc. Even menus can be planned ahead in order to facilitate grocery shopping and in turn, be cost-conscious.

This schedule will also help to maintain balance, as it will be clear to see whether both are spending enough time as a couple alone, with each of the in-laws, or if there is too much time being spent at work, or with friends without the spouse, etc. It will also help to ensure that both parties are executing their respective roles, and will help to avoid the conflict of both husband and wife coming home from work to no dinner, etc. **Planning and patience are crucial!**

Inviting people over

Neither party should invite people to the house without letting the other know in advance (exceptions accepted). Neither party should invite people the other is uncomfortable with, unless it is those for whom Allah has enshrined a right in Islam (parents and blood relations).

Children

The decision about when to have children must be mutual. There should be no pressure exerted by either set of parents-in-law, though it is acceptable to express a desire. Disagreement about when to have children should not be made into a major issue in the first year or two of marriage.

At the birth of the child, will the wife spend some time at her mother's home, or, more commonly, will her mother come to help her in her own home? Or will she remain with her husband and/or in-laws?

If there is difficulty in conceiving, it could be due to medical problems on either side. Medically speaking, causes of infertility are equally distributed between the sexes, so it is not fair to blame one partner or the other. Medical help should be sought if there has been no pregnancy after one year of trying and both partners should seek advice together. Be understanding and supportive if there is a medical issue - you are in this for life. This should not be a cause for separation. Support your spouse, as you would want to be supported.

IV. Building a lasting relationship

A happy marriage can make a couple's life paradise on earth. It can be a huge blessing and bring immense bliss, peace, and harmony in their lives. However, this is only possible with a lot of dedication and hard work on both sides. One can only get as much as one puts in the relationship.

Value of Prayer

An Islamic marriage cannot be successful without prayer. The newlywed couple should begin and end each day with prayer. They should wake up for Tahajjud prayer, offer Fajr prayer together and try to make it a habit to offer two Nawafil each day for the success of their marriage. This is the most powerful tool and will go a long way to help them protect their marriage.

(Reference: The Holy Prophet (pbuh) said: 'May Allah have mercy on a man who gets up at night and prays, then he wakes his wife and she prays, and if she refuses he sprinkles water in her face. And may Allah have mercy on a woman who gets up at night and prays, then she wakes her husband and prays, and if he refuses she sprinkles water in his face.' Nasai, Abu Dawud)

Following the models of the Holy Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be on him) and that of the Promised Messiah (peace be on him)

The blessed lives of the Holy Prophet (pbuh) and the Promised Messiah (as) serve as practical guidance for us. Their interaction with their wives and guidance provided to them is a model we can follow. They led by example in their household and adopted the virtues they expected in their spouses. As Ahmadi Muslims, we need to show the highest moral standards in our family lives. It will be helpful to periodically analyze our conduct and strive for improvement.

Write letters to Hazrat Khalīfatul Masīh (may Allah be his Helper)

A second crucial step is to write regularly to Huzoor (may Allah be his Helper) to request prayers for their marriage. When they develop this connection with the Khalīfa of the time (may Allah be his Helper) a positive difference in their relationship will be evident and they will earn the blessing of his prayers as another layer of protection over them.

Spending time together

In the early days of marriage, it is expected that the newlywed couple will and should spend most of their time together. If feasible, going away on a honeymoon helps the new couple develop a mutual understanding. On the other hand, going about their normal business as if nothing has happened is building a poor foundation for the future.

Developing communication skills

The couple should be able to talk to each other openly and sincerely. Men and women have vastly different ways to communicate with one another. This difference should be realized early and an effort made to improve one's communication skills accordingly, as needed.

Respect

They must treat each other with respect in whatever they do, like, dislike, enjoy, have an interest in, or prefer. Their tastes may well differ in many ways. As they are two different individuals coming together, they should be understanding and give each other time and leeway to adjust to change. There will be time enough in the future to merge their tastes and preferences together, Insha'Allah. Both parties should respect one another's feelings and avoid anything that causes concern to the other, if it is a reasonable request (e.g., the wife asking her husband not to interact freely with other women).

(Reference: "Consort with them (wives) in kindness." The Holy Quran, 4:20)

Tolerance and Understanding

While trying to adjust to each other they should be tolerant of the mistakes or difficulties they may experience. Some issues may just be very difficult to overcome. It may be impossible for one to suddenly stop snoring, perspiring excessively, or laughing a certain way, etc. They should exercise restraint and tolerance. There may be difficulties in adjusting to dietary preferences; not liking something cooked a certain way, etc. Patience and understanding are needed, rather than feeling slighted and blaming the other for not respecting the culinary skills of the in-laws.

Trust

A new life partner is now on the scene, a person with whom everything is going to be shared at some time or other. Without question, one another's secrets and personal details must be kept **absolutely confidential**. This means that parents and siblings will need to be placed in a lower hierarchy and the spouse is now the first and foremost point of reference. One must remember this fact and not breach the confidence and trust the other partner has placed on them.

(Reference: The Holy Prophet (pbuh) said, "The most wicked among the people in the eyes of Allah on the Day of judgment is the man who goes to his wife and she comes to him, and then he divulges her secret." Sahih Muslim)

Honesty

There are no secrets or lies between husband and wife. They must be open and truthful with one another so there is no cause for future misunderstandings or suspicions.

The wife of the Promised Messiah (peace be on him), Hazrat Amman Jan (may Allah be pleased with her), advised women never to keep secrets from their husbands. She said if one makes a mistake, one should openly admit it rather than attempting to conceal it. She explained: “The husband may not see what goes on but Almighty Allah does. Ultimately, when the matter is exposed it diminishes the dignity of the woman”.

Privacy

The husband and wife relationship should remain private, and issues of this nature are best discussed only between the couple themselves. Involving outsiders should be avoided for the first few weeks/as long as can be managed. The couple should try to work things out between themselves and give each other due consideration for their inexperience.

(Reference: Huzoor (aba) said, "About 30–40% of cases are being ruined by the in-laws on both sides. In this also, the parents of the girl are less responsible." Khutbat-e-Masroor, volume 4: 565)

Privacy of the in-laws

Both partners are entrusted with whatever happens within their new family. That trust must not be breached. Outsiders should not be told about what happens in one another’s families, especially if a weakness or fault is noticed in the new home - everyone has faults, even one’s own family. The in-law family culture may be new to them, but they owe it to their in-laws to be respectful and open-minded. The new husband and wife should keep matters that they witness in the homes of their in-laws private and not divulge details to their own parents. Parents will naturally be very sensitive to their children's wellbeing, and may overreact to small issues, even if the couple is happy together. Some judgement and tact should be exercised when speaking about in-laws to anyone else. The in-laws will certainly reciprocate the good will.

Relationship with the rest of the family

While being together as a couple for the most part, obligations to the rest of the family must not be forgotten. It is important for one partner to give the other enough time to still fulfill their obligations to parents or siblings – such as seeing and greeting them in the mornings and or having a meal with them, if that is the norm. The couple should try to remember to inquire after other members of the family, so that they do not feel ignored. Calling one’s parents periodically and letting them know how things are proceeding is an important duty to remember.

Relationship with friends

The couple should now be mindful of the fact that relationship priorities have changed and the spouse is now the priority. Friends will have to take a back seat and time allocation to them will

have to be reduced. A complete cut-off is not recommended either and one should be allowed to contact friends and update them from time to time.

Relationship boundaries prescribed by Islam

Marriage is a sacred gift from God, and should be treated as a precious treasure. It is a lifelong commitment and a delicate matter; not a temporary arrangement that can be dealt with immaturely or foolishly. Both husband and wife should be clearly aware of the instructions of marriage and the roles of husbands and wives as outlined in the Holy Qur'an, the Aḥādīth, the Ten Conditions of Bai'at, and by the Khulafa. Both parties are responsible for helping to maintain the sanctity of marriage by covering one another's faults, keeping personal issues private and honoring their spouse in the same way that they would like to be treated.

Marriage: a partnership and a journey

The couple should try to focus on each other's strengths and not weaknesses. Marriage is a journey. It has its ups and downs. It will require personal sacrifice from both parties at some point. Everyone wants peace of mind and contentment when things are going well, but should also be prepared to be strong and steadfast when they are not.

(Reference: "They are a garment for you, and you are a garment for them." Holy Quran, 2:188)

V. Potential Conflicts and Resolution

(Reference: The Holy Prophet (pbuh) said: "The best of you is the one who is best to his wife, and I am the best of you to my wives." Tirmidhi, Ibn Majah)

After the first few weeks, when the euphoria of marriage settles down, the newlywed couple begins to see their partner and new families in a different light. Things which had been ignored before, may become significant now. One should try one's best not to focus on miss-steps in the early phase of marriage. One party gives up something, the other gives up something else and together, they reach a middle ground. They must realize that this is their new life and they have to adjust to the new reality. In order for the marriage to succeed, both parties must have a commitment to make it work.

Marriage is a union between two individuals and two families. It may be easier to resolve differences between two individuals rather than between the two families. A family is made up of more than two individuals who have had practices, habits and traditions ingrained for years. Therefore, the couple will be well advised not to confront either family head-on. In a spirit of compromise it is best to accept or tolerate the practices, habits and traditions of the other family – unless they are clearly un-Islamic.

Conflicts or other issues with the partner or their family are best discussed directly with the partner alone in a spirit of forbearance, tolerance and mutual understanding. It is best not to involve other members of both families as they may provide solutions best suited to their own point of view. **Interference from families is a frequent cause of marriage breakdowns.**

If any difficulties arise, they must be tackled with mutual respect and with the view that a solution will be found. Above all, Taqwa must be kept foremost in mind – that is, will Allah be happy or unhappy if this issue is brought to the fore? Every potential conflict should be addressed with prayers.

Disputes and Arguments

Disagreements will occur in normal human discourse, sometimes frequently. The couple is well advised to remember these important tips:

- Avoid answering back.
- Avoid talking when the other is angry.
- Never bring the other's family into the argument (e.g., "Your parents or other family members are like this also", etc.)

- Never raise your voice. All issues, big or small, should be discussed calmly, maturely, and in a normal tone.
- Avoid using bad language at all costs.
- Never become violent (i.e. throw things, punch or slap). The surest way of losing respect is to display violence of any kind.
- Try to end an argument as soon as you can. This can be done by either apologizing (even if you are wrong and the other is too proud to accept it – you can correct them later when they are in a better mood), or by not responding to the arguments.
- If arguments become persistent, more experienced and sensible senior family members can help, as long as they do not take sides.
- Sometimes a junior family member close to one partner may be able to provide help and quick resolution.

Avoid these Pitfalls

- Beware of any third party who seeks to gain influence in marital matters, which should remain only between husband and wife. (e.g., wife's best friend always telling her to argue with her husband for various reasons, or husband's mother always telling him to be more firm with his wife)
- Beware of other people who enquire about your in-laws from you, hoping to find areas of criticism.
- Beware of friends and relatives who seek to know about how things are going but are actually more interested in getting juicy gossip rather than offering genuine help.

If all this does not seem to be working, then it is better to involve appropriate outsiders on a confidential basis. If one partner or their family is acting in a way that endangers the other or their health, or is a gross violation of Islamic teachings, help should be sought in a mature manner (i.e., the local Jama'at President should be involved; he may assign member(s) of the local Islahi Committee to help, in complete confidence of course.)

One should discuss with one's parents for help and advice.

Requesting Huzoor (may Allah be his Helper) and other righteous people regularly for prayers is essential and very rewarding.

Finally, the power of prayer should not be underestimated.

وَالَّذِينَ يَقُولُونَ رَبَّنَا هَبْ لَنَا مِنْ أَزْوَاجِنَا وَذُرِّيَّاتِنَا قُرَّةَ أَعْيُنٍ وَاجْعَلْنَا لِلْمُتَّقِينَ إِمَامًا

"Rabbana hub lana min azwajina wa zurriyyatina qurrata a'yunnin wajalna lil muttaqeena imaama"

And those who say, 'Our Lord, grant us of our wives and children the delight of *our* eyes, and make us a model for the righteous. (The Holy Qur'an 25:75).