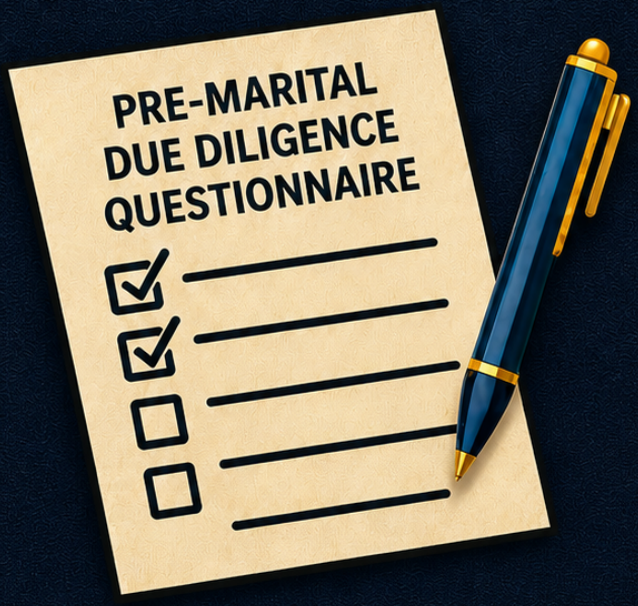
MORE IMPORTANT THAN THE WEDDING



For Muslim Couples and Their Families

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

PART I
UNDERSTANDING MARRIAGE

For All Muslim Couples Planning to Marry 3
Copyright Notice 4
What This IS (and ISN'T)..... 5
A Note to Parents Imams and Family Elders ...6
A Note to Non-Muslim Parents & Family Members.....7
Marriage for Muslims Living in Western Countries.....8
Different Assumptions of Marriage.....9
Marriage as a Spiritual Partnership.....10
Why This Questionnaire Matters 10
For Parents Who are Gifting This.....11
Introduction 12
Fu....ll Disclosure 14
Legal Disclaimer 15
What "Due Diligence" Means 17
Due Diligence and Pre-Nuptial Agreement..... 18
Marriage in Legal and Partnership Terms (Western Context) 19
Marriage is a Partnership.....19
Marriage as aLegal Contract.....20
Marriage Under Civil Law.....21
Decision Making and Responsibility.....21
Love, Faith and Reality.....21
What Non-Muslim Marriage Means in Legal Terms.....22
Marriage Isn't The Same Everywhere.....25
Some Words of Warning.....30
Roles, Responsibilities & Expectations.....31
What Comes First: Child Welfare or the Marriage? 33
Mental Health History 36
Personal Case Study.....37
Healthy vs Unhealthy Disagreement 39
The Eight Areas This Questionnaire Covers.....42
Some Questions May Feel Uncomfortable 43
Confidentiality 44

PART 2
THE DUE DILIGENCE QUESTIONNAIRE

Personal Background & Family 45
Faith, Religious Practice & Islamic Expectations.....46
Wali, Content & Family Approval.....46
Modesty Expectations.....46
Islamic Finance.....47
Personal Values, Attitudes & Character.....47
Health, Wellbeing & Future Family Medical.....48
Drugs, Alcohol & Addictions.....49
Health, Fertility & Intimacy.....49
Long-Term Care & Resilience.....50
Relationships, Trust & Communication.....50
Digital Privacy.....50
Past Relationships 51
Conflict Resolution.....52
Marriage Expectations.....52
Civil Marriage Registration 53
Legal.....53
Money & Financial Responsibility.....53
Financial Philosophy Beyond Debt.....53
Family, Parents & Community.....55
Family Expectations.....55
Extended Family Boundaries.....55
Building Our Future Together.....55
Where We Live 56
Our Marriage Agreements.....57
Key Agreements Before Marriage.....57
Red Flag Conversations..... 57
Before We Marry..... 58
Some Final Thoughts.....59
Coming in 2027 ....., ... 60
About the Author 61

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FOR ALL MUSLIM COUPLES PLANNING TO MARRY

COMPLETE THIS TOGETHER BEFORE THE WEDDING

Before any wedding, couples spend months—sometimes years—planning a single day. But very few devote the same time and attention to preparing for the lifetime that follows.

This questionnaire exists for one simple reason: to help you enter marriage with more clarity, honesty and confidence.

It is of particular relevance to Muslim couples who may be living and working in a non-Muslim country where the legal aspects of marriage are often very different. These issues need to be understood - in addition to marriage under Islamic Law and your faith.

One western, non-muslim woman who used an earlier edition of this questionnaire expressed exactly why this matters:

"The Due Diligence Checklist is truly amazing. I downloaded it and shared it with friends… I wish something like this had existed before I married. Our vicar never asked the difficult questions, and many issues were never discussed—even after the wedding. My marriage eventually ended because we wanted different things about children.

As a single mother now, I'll be using the Checklist if I date again, and I'll be encouraging my children to do the same when they're older."
— Melanie Coombs

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Her story is not unusual. Many marital difficulties arise in marriages regardless of faith, break down not because the couple is 'wrong' for each other, but because important topics were never explored openly before promising a life together. This detailed questionnaire helps you avoid that mistake.

The purpose of this guide is therefore not to tell you what to think. It is to help you understand each other better.

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This eBook is provided for personal use only.

It is designed to be given as an engagement gift to help Muslim couples start marriage wisely; please respect the author's work by not copying or sharing it and by encouraging others to obtain their own copy.

If you believe this guide may help other couples prepare for marriage more thoughtfully, please feel free to recommend it.

This is the ONLY place this guide can be purchased legally - click here

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WHAT THIS IS (AND ISN'T)

Marriage is one of the most significant legal, emotional and financial commitments you will ever make.

WHAT THIS IS

- A structured pre-marital due diligence process
- A framework for difficult but necessary conversations
- A risk-awareness tool
- A transparency exercise
- A way to identify alignment — and misalignment — before legal commitment
- A governance document for your future partnership

This is about seeking clarity on important topics that will have a decades-long impact on your future life and a possible family.

WHAT THIS IS NOT

- It is not a psychological test
- It is not a trap
- It is not an interrogation
- It is not anti-marriage
- It is not designed to create doubt where none exists
- It is not about looking for reasons to leave
- It is about removing reasons for future regret

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A NOTE TO PARENTS, IMAMS AND FAMILY ELDERS

Throughout the Muslim world, parents, family members, Imams and trusted elders have traditionally played an important role in helping young men and women prepare for married life. Their wisdom, experience and guidance can be invaluable.

This ebook was written with that tradition in mind.

While the questions in these pages are intended primarily for prospective husbands and wives, they can also be used by parents, family members, marriage mentors, counsellors and religious leaders to help a couple prepare thoughtfully and responsibly for their forthcoming marriage.

Many of the most serious challenges that muslim couples encounter after marriage are not caused by a lack of love. They arise because important conversations never took place beforehand.

Expectations about faith, finances, family responsibilities, children, health, communication, conflict, living arrangements and future goals are often assumed rather than discussed. This can lead to confusion, disappointment and unnecessary tension after the wedding.

The purpose of this book is not to replace Islamic guidance, family involvement or professional advice where appropriate. Its purpose is simply to encourage honest conversations before lifelong promises are made.

As parents and elders, there can be a natural desire to protect those we love from making mistakes. However, while guidance is valuable, lasting marriages are built when both individuals willingly engage in open discussion, take personal responsibility and make informed decisions for themselves. Your own experiences of marriage are not universal. So, if you are using this book to support a son, daughter, family member or member of your community, encourage them to approach these discussions with honesty, humility and kindness.

The goal is to help the couple understand each other more clearly, identify areas that require further discussion and build a stronger foundation for a successful marriage.

The conversations you encourage today may help strengthen that marriage for many decades to come.

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A NOTE TO NON-MUSLIM PARENTS AND FAMILY MEMBERS

REMOVED FROM THIS SAMPLE

MARRIAGE FOR MUSLIMS LIVING IN WESTERN COUNTRIES

For many Muslims living in Britain, Europe, North America, Australia and other Western countries, marriage exists within two different frameworks at the same time.

- The first is the Islamic framework.
- The second is the legal framework of the country in which they live and work.

Both matter. And both affect the rights, responsibilities and expectations of husbands and wives.

Many Muslims naturally focus on the Nikah ceremony because it represents a sacred covenant before Allah. The Nikah is therefore not merely a romantic commitment. It is a serious agreement built on rights, responsibilities, trust, mercy, compassion and mutual accountability.

Marriage in Islam is viewed as far more than a legal arrangement between two individuals. It is a spiritual partnership designed to help husband and wife support one another, build a stable family, raise children, protect one another's dignity and strengthen their faith.

For this reason, many Muslims grow up learning about:

- Nikah (the marriage contract)
- Mahr (the marriage gift)
- Family responsibilities
- The rights of husband and wife
- Respect for parents and elders
- Raising children within the faith
- Divorce procedures under Islamic law

These subjects are critically important because they shape expectations about married life.

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However, for Muslims living in Western countries, there is another reality that must also be understood. The state may recognise marriage very differently. Civil law does not determine whether a marriage is spiritually successful. Nor does it determine whether a husband or wife has fulfilled their religious obligations. Instead, civil law focuses on practical matters such as:

- Property ownership
- Financial responsibilities
- Taxation
- Inheritance
- Child welfare
- Divorce procedures
- Financial settlements
- Parental responsibilities

In other words, Islamic marriage and civil marriage often overlap, but they are not identical.

A husband may fully understand his responsibilities under Islamic law while knowing very little about the legal consequences of marriage under the laws of the country where he lives.

Likewise, a wife may understand her Islamic rights while remaining unaware of how civil law may affect her financial position, parental rights or future responsibilities.

This is not a criticism of either system. It is simply reality.

A wise couple needs to understand both.

DIFFERENT ASSUMPTIONS

Many Western societies tend to view marriage primarily as a relationship between two individuals. Islam certainly recognises the importance of the husband and wife relationship, but it also places significant emphasis on wider family connections and responsibilities. Parents, siblings, grandparents and extended family often play a much larger role in the lives of Muslim couples than is common in many modern Western societies.

This can be a tremendous source of support, wisdom and stability. It can also create areas of misunderstanding if expectations are not discussed openly before marriage.

Questions such as these deserve careful discussion:

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- How involved should parents be in our married life?
- What role should family members play when disagreements arise?
- What obligations do we have towards ageing parents?
- Would we ever live with family members?
- How will major family decisions be made?

Different answers do not automatically mean incompatibility. But unspoken assumptions can create conflict later.

MARRIAGE AS A SPIRITUAL PARTNERSHIP

One of the most significant differences between Islamic and secular understandings of marriage is the role of faith itself. For practising Muslims, marriage is not simply about personal happiness.

- It is also about worship.
- It is about helping one another become better people.
- It is about encouraging good character, patience, kindness, honesty and self-discipline.
- It is about supporting one another during hardship.
- It is about creating a home in which faith can flourish.

Because of this, questions about religious practice are not secondary issues. They are central to the success of the marriage. Matters such as prayer, fasting, modesty, charitable giving, religious education and raising children within Islam should be discussed openly and honestly before marriage.

Avoiding these conversations rarely makes differences disappear.

WHY THIS QUESTIONNAIRE MATTERS

The purpose of this questionnaire is not to judge, criticise or interrogate anyone. Nor is it intended to replace religious guidance, legal advice or marital counselling. Its purpose is much simpler:

- To help two people enter marriage with their eyes wide open.
- To encourage honest conversations before promises are made.

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- To identify areas of agreement, areas of uncertainty and areas requiring further discussion.
- And to help create the foundations of a marriage built not only on attraction and affection, but also on truth, understanding and trust.

The strongest marriages are not built on assumptions. They are built on clarity. And that is the purpose of the pages that follow.

A BRIEF NOTE TO PARENTS WHO ARE GIFTING THIS

When your son or daughter becomes engaged, a few things change — obviously for them — but also for you. Your role as parents is no longer quite the same. You still love and care for them deeply, of course, but you can no longer guide their decisions in the same way you once did. As many parents discover, the more they try to intervene, the more it can push their adult children away.

In many cases, grown children no longer want parental advice. As part of building their own independent lives, they understandably want to make their own decisions — even when those decisions involve marriage.

It's a common dilemma for parents.

Because you — like every married person — know something that engaged couples are only just beginning to discover: a wedding and a marriage are not the same thing. And while everyone hopes for "happily ever after," experience teaches us that a strong marriage rarely happens by accident.

This short guide, written by someone outside your family, is therefore not about interference. Nor is it about introducing doubt or dampening their excitement. Instead, it is simply a thoughtful engagement gift — one that gently encourages the kind of conversations that help couples build strong, resilient marriages that last a lifetime.

Many other parents say that when they first read this document, they immediately recognised how valuable these conversations would have been before their own marriages began.

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OUR PARENTAL MESSAGE TO THE ENGAGED COUPLE:

- May this guide spark helpful conversations that deepen trust.
- May it help you ask the questions that matter.
- May it strengthen what is already good.
- And may it serve as a quiet reminder that you are loved and supported — always.

We give this with love, respect, and complete confidence in the future you are building together.

INTRODUCTION

Huge congratulations on your engagement. I'm sure you've been inundated with best wishes for the future from immediate and extended family, as well as friends and colleagues. It is a time for celebration as you prepare for your future lives together.

Couples often spend months — sometimes years — planning the wedding.

- The venue.
- The dress.
- The guest list.
- Accommodation
- Menus
- Photographer.
- The honeymoon.

The list goes on and on. And the costs invariably go up and up. The conversations inevitably revolve around the 'big day'.

But very few couples devote anything close to that amount of time and structure preparing for the marriage that follows.

So between now and your wedding, make a point of having more conversations with family and friends about 'marriage', not exclusively about the wedding.

And that especially includes with your partner. And this has to be said - if your partner shows little interest in such conversations (or is always 'too busy', 'too tired' etc) it could be a red flag for the future.

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This detailed questionnaire exists to help you both enter marriage with far more clarity and transparency, and a shared understanding of all the legal, financial and familial responsibilities that are an integral part of marriage today.

Prior to publication, *"More Important than The Wedding"* was shared with a number of married (and some divorced) trusted friends of different faiths for their insights and improvements. It is far better because of them. So thank you.

The most common feedback has been *"OMG - I WISH something like this had been available when we first got married."* And *"I've been happily married for decades, but the section on managing disagreements and conflict was especially valuable - I will use those techniques from now on. Brilliant."*

If have been given this document as an engagement gift, I can confidently **guarantee** that whoever gave it to you, read, analysed and assessed it thoroughly before they made the decision to share it with you! At the very least, this means they have agreed with enough of it to be confident that it could be helpful to you.

It would be naive to expect everyone to agree with everything within this document. And that's OK.

But what a fantastic reason to use it as a conversation starter about your future marriage with parents, extended family members and friends.

A good marriage requires effort from both partners. But the rewards are worth it. Personally, marriage offers emotional security — the knowledge that one person has chosen you deliberately and publicly. And has 'got your back' at all times. Marriage reduces loneliness, lightens the load of life's burdens, and provides continuity through illness, career upheaval, ageing and loss. Life is rarely simple. Everyone experiences what I call 'life storms'. Watch trees during a violent storm. They bend and sway to absorb the forces being thrown at them. Their deep root systems

built over many years, provide the essential stability to weather each storm. A good marriage provides a similar strong, stable root system.

Psychologically, stable and satisfying marriages are consistently associated with greater life satisfaction, lower chronic stress, and increased resilience. Secure attachment reduces anxiety. Emotional reliability reduces uncertainty. In a healthy marriage, Conflict itself doesn't necessarily enrich marriage. But constructively resolving differences can strengthen a relationship..

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For children, the quality of the parental bond matters profoundly. Children require stability. A cooperative, respectful marital relationship provides a predictable emotional climate in which children can thrive.

Marriage is not a guarantee of happiness. But a well-functioning one — grounded in honesty, mutual respect and shared values — remains one of the most powerful structures for long-term personal stability and family coherence.

FULL DISCLOSURE:

I am British. And Non-Muslim. A former BBC reporter and presenter. And nearly 68 as I write this. I have been married and divorced twice.

One was simply sad. The other was catastrophic and should never have happened.

In all seriousness, I would have willingly paid thousands to have had this document available to me all those decades ago. It would have stopped a marriage from happening that should not have taken place in the first place. And saved me a great deal of emotional and financial heartache. Thankfully, there were no children involved.

After the inevitable divorce of the toxic marriage, so many said the same *"We knew it wasn't going to last"*. Yet no one told me that before, because as they later explained, they didn't want to 'spoil the wedding day'. Or risk losing the friendship.

Let me be VERY clear: I am NOT anti-marriage. I am anti-BAD marriage.

So, there is a small possibility this document COULD lead either, or both of you, to pause or cancel your wedding and your future marriage. As distressing as that could be in the short-term, it could potentially save you from untold stress, unhappiness and a considerable amount of money.

Based on this, for legal reasons I HAVE to include the detailed disclaimer on the following pages:

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LEGAL DISCLAIMER

This document is provided for general educational and informational purposes only. It is designed to help you think more clearly about your relationship, your planned marriage and personal decision-making regarding your future life together. It does not replace professional advice.

The author is not acting as a lawyer, therapist, counsellor, financial adviser, or medical professional. Laws, financial regulations, and relationship norms vary between jurisdictions and may change over time.

Nothing in this document constitutes:

- Legal advice
- Financial advice
- Medical or psychological advice
- A diagnosis of any person or relationship

Before making significant decisions regarding marriage, finances, property, children, separation, personal safety, or health, you should seek qualified professional advice appropriate to your circumstances.

Personal Responsibility
Any examples or scenarios included are illustrative and generalised. They are not intended to describe specific individuals or predict outcomes.

You are solely responsible for:

- How you interpret this material
- The decisions you make
- Any actions you take

The author cannot assess your individual circumstances and accepts no liability for outcomes arising from the use or misuse of this document.

Emotional & Sensitive Content
Some topics addressed may involve difficult or distressing subject matter, including conflict, trauma, manipulation, or abuse. If reading this

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material causes distress, or if you feel unsafe, overwhelmed, or at risk, seek appropriate professional or emergency support in your location.

Acceptance of Terms

This document is designed to help you **think**, not tell you what to do. It offers perspective, not instructions. You are encouraged to use it as a starting point — not a substitute for professional guidance.

By choosing to complete this questionnaire, you acknowledge that you have read and understood this disclaimer and agree to accept full responsibility for your own decisions and actions.

WHAT "DUE DILIGENCE" MEANS IN A RELATIONSHIP

'Due diligence' is a phrase that comes from business. Before anyone buys a company, a responsible buyer investigates:

- Financial history
- Liabilities
- Legal obligations
- Hidden risks
- Existing commitments

It's common practice for a potential buyer to hire a team of lawyers, accountants, risk assessors, corporate governance specialists and more, to scrutinise the purchase. This is to ensure there are no shocks or surprises for the buyer. And to uncover potential problems and highlight misleading assumptions.

No sensible person would ever invest their life savings in a new business without understanding what they are acquiring.

Marriage deserves at least the same seriousness. When you marry, you are not only committing emotionally. You are entering:

- A legal partnership
- A financial partnership
- A family system - future children effectively become 'shareholders' of your marriage partnership, introducing significant on-going costs and responsibilities.

Due diligence in a relationship means:

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•Transparent disclosure
• Honest discussion of past behaviour
• Review of mental health history
• Examination of financial habits
• Exploration of values and expectations
• Future career and home priorities
• Clarity around children, shared roles and the long-term direction of the relationship.

This is not about a lack of trust. It's about respect: Respect for yourself. Respect for your partner. And above all, respect for the lifelong promise to each other that you are preparing for.

MARRIAGE IN RELIGIOUS, PARTNERSHIP AND LEGAL TERMS

In Islam, marriage (Nikah) is far more than a romantic relationship. It is a serious commitment made before Allah. And is a partnership built upon trust, kindness, responsibility, mutual respect and compassion. Marriage is intended to provide:

- Love and companionship
- Emotional support
- Family stability
- A secure environment for children
- Mutual protection and dignity
- Spiritual growth and encouragement

The Quran describes marriage as a relationship characterised by affection and mercy. While attraction and compatibility may help bring two people together, a successful marriage requires far more than feelings alone. It requires character, commitment and a willingness to fulfil responsibilities towards one another.

For Muslims, marriage is not simply about finding the right person.

It is also about being (or becoming) the right person for each other.

MARRIAGE AS A PARTNERSHIP

A healthy marriage is a long-term partnership in which both husband and wife contribute to the wellbeing of the family. Although different families may organise their responsibilities differently, most successful marriages are built on:

- Cooperation

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- Communication
- Shared decision-making
- Mutual respect
- Financial responsibility
- Consideration for each other's needs
- Marriage affects almost every aspect of adult life.

This affects:

- Finances
- Housing
- Family relationships
- Future children
- Lifestyle choices
- Career decisions
- Long-term personal and joint goals

The decisions made by one spouse often affect the other. For this reason, it is essential to discuss expectations openly before marriage, rather than assume that both of you see things in the same way. Many later marital difficulties arise because the parties never realised they held quite different expectations in the first place.

MARRIAGE AS A LEGAL CONTRACT

Islamic marriage is also a legal contract. The Nikah establishes rights and responsibilities for both husband and wife. These include:

- Mahr (the marriage gift)
- Financial provision
- Maintenance and support
- Mutual rights and obligations
- Inheritance rights
- Responsibilities towards children

Unlike many informal relationships, marriage creates clear responsibilities that both parties voluntarily accept. These responsibilities exist not only before the law but also before Allah. For this reason, honesty, transparency and good character are essential before entering marriage.

Important matters such as health, debt, family responsibilities, previous marriages and future expectations need to be discussed openly and truthfully.

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MARRIAGE UNDER CIVIL LAW

In many countries, civil law may treat husband and wife as a legal and economic partnership. This means that decisions made by one spouse can sometimes have significant consequences for the other. For example:

A husband or wife who accumulates substantial debts, develops a gambling problem or makes risky financial decisions may create difficulties that affect the entire family.

Similarly, a spouse who leaves employment to raise children may become financially dependent on the other spouse for a period of time. Understanding these realities is not about mistrust. It is about being better informed.

Wise couples discuss financial habits, responsibilities and expectations before marriage rather than discovering these critically important differences later.

DECISION-MAKING AND RESPONSIBILITY

Marriage creates a level of responsibility that does not usually exist in ordinary friendships or dating relationships. In both Islamic and civil frameworks, spouses often become each other's closest legal and practical partners. This may include:

- Supporting one another during illness
- Helping make important decisions
- Managing family finances
- Caring for children
- Supporting ageing parents
- Planning for the future

If one spouse becomes seriously ill or incapacitated, the other may be expected to make important decisions on their behalf. For this reason, trustworthiness, honesty and good judgement are essential qualities in a future husband or wife.

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LOVE, FAITH AND REALITY

Many people marry because of love, attraction, friendship or shared faith. These are important.

However, successful marriages are sustained not only by feelings but also by commitment, responsibility and trust. Marriage involves rights and responsibilities. It involves sacrifice and compromise. And it involves supporting another human being through both good times and difficult times.

WHAT NON-MUSLIM MARRIAGE MEANS IN LEGAL AND PARTNERSHIP TERMS

AND

MARRIAGE ISN'T THE SAME EVERYWHERE
REMOVED FROM THIS SAMPLE

SOME WORDS OF WARNING

Cases like this may be uncommon, but they illustrate why taking the time to verify someone's identity, background and intentions before marriage is so important.

In November 2026, the BBC reported the disturbing experience of a British Muslim woman, identified as Jane, whose Islamic marriage ended just five days after the wedding.

Jane, a convert to Islam, had met a man through a Muslim marriage app. After months of online conversations and video calls, she believed she had found someone who loved her and wanted to build a future together. Jane had wanted to marry in Glasgow, Scotland surrounded by family and friends, but her prospective husband resisted arrangements that required official identification as

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part of the process and a civil marriage. Instead, they had a nikah in Lancashire in the North of England.

Following the ceremony, they spent two nights together in a hotel. Jane believed she was beginning married life with a man who genuinely loved her. Just five days after the wedding, he ended their marriage by text message.

Jane subsequently discovered that he had used a different name and was already married. She believes he had deliberately deceived her into marriage to obtain a sexual relationship, then abandoned her once he got what he wanted. The man, through his lawyers, has strongly denied her allegations.

The case raised concerns about inadequate identity checks during religious marriage ceremonies and the lack of legal protection when an Islamic marriage is not accompanied by a civil marriage.

Deception is not exclusive to men or women. Either can misrepresent their identity, circumstances, intentions or past relationships to manipulate someone who genuinely wants to marry.

The lesson is not to become suspicious of everyone but to recognise that trust needs to be earned, not simply given. So before committing to marriage, verify important information independently, involve people you trust, and pay attention when someone resists reasonable questions about their identity, marital status or background.

A genuine prospective spouse has every reason to expect transparency. Marriage is far too important a decision to leave these most basic and essential questions unanswered.

Source: BBC News, Yunus Mulla and Lauren Hirst, 10 November 2026. "Divorced after five days: 'My sham husband made me believe he loved me'."

ROLES, RESPONSIBILITIES AND EXPECTATIONS

Before we get into the 'due diligence' questionnaire, let's address some critically important aspects of modern marriage. The purpose of this section is not to promote any particular structure of marriage, but to encourage couples to discuss expectations openly rather than assume they share the same views.

In modern life, some subjects have become difficult to discuss openly. However, the following **must** be discussed between an engaged couple. Assumptions can hurt a marriage.

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An example comes to mind: the moment two friends married, the wife announced to her new husband that she hated her job and had decided to stop working. It had never been discussed before. This meant an instant and fairly substantial reduction in joint monthly income. In order to fill the short-fall, the husband felt compelled to get a higher-paid job which he disliked intensely. She didn't care that he felt betrayed and used by her.

How do you think that impacted the quality of their married life?

Successful marriages are sustained by clarity and joint agreement between two adults about how they intend to live. For many couples, this includes conversations about gender roles.

- Who will be the primary earner?
- Who will step back professionally if children arrive?
- Is one partner comfortable being financially dependent on the other?
- Is the idea of a stay-at-home mother welcomed, tolerated, or quietly resented?
- Does a man feel a deep responsibility to provide?
- Does a woman feel a deep desire to nurture full-time?
- Or are both strongly committed to symmetrical careers and shared domestic labour?
- These are not ideological questions. They are practical ones.

In recent decades, it is often suggested that men and women are interchangeable in all areas. Yet in private, many couples discover that instinct, temperament, ambition, biology and upbringing influence their preferences in ways that do not neatly align with politically correct gender narratives.

There is nothing inherently oppressive about a man being the primary breadwinner — if both partners freely choose that structure.

There is nothing inherently regressive about a woman choosing to prioritise motherhood — if that choice is voluntary and respected. Equally, there is nothing inherently superior about both parties having careers even if it leaves one or both feeling quietly exhausted or resentful.

The danger isn't about how you do it, but in the assumptions you haven't talked about. Resentment grows when one partner silently expects traditional structure while the other expects modern parity.

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Tension grows even more when a woman assumes she will continue her career with expectations of future promotions after children, while her partner assumes she will scale back. Conflict grows when a man feels judged for wanting to provide — or when a woman feels judged for wanting not to.

These differences are not solved by politically correct ideology. They are solved by mutual agreement. Before marriage, each partner must therefore be honest:

- What structure would genuinely make you both feel mutually respected?
- What would make either of you feel diminished?
- What would you each struggle to accept five years from now?

Please discuss these issues fully before you have children and mortgages. And before exhaustion raises the stakes even higher!

WHAT COMES FIRST: CHILD WELFARE OR THE MARRIAGE?

Starting a family together is a priority for many young couples.

Without exception, that decision MUST be a joint one. Because of that, one of the most uncomfortable — yet essential — truths about marriage is this:

> Children need love, care and protection. They also benefit deeply from parents who continue to protect the marriage itself. A child-centred home does not require a marriage-neglecting home.

The early years of marriage and parenthood are widely recognised as one of the most vulnerable for marriage stability. In many modern families, especially in the early years of parenthood, the emotional centre of gravity shifts almost entirely toward the child. Exhaustion, anxiety, protective instinct and social expectations all reinforce the idea that a ‘good parent’ or more specifically a ‘good mother’ must put the child first in all things.

However, strong marriages are not sustained by good intentions alone.

I accept that modern marital roles are sometimes different to the following, but in most cases, it’s like this: if a husband becomes peripheral (or feels he is) — emotionally, physically, relationally — resentment quietly accumulates. Not because he competes with his child(ren), but because he experiences neglect. Neglect can be a marriage cancer.

The same dynamic can occur in reverse of course, where a wife feels abandoned emotionally, is physically exhausted all the time because of the children, while

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her partner directs his energy almost exclusively into work, under the well-intentioned belief that the money he brings into the family demonstrates his commitment to the family.

Both attitudes are common. But they can both become destructive or even corrosive.

Decades of research show that marital satisfaction typically declines following the birth of a first child. Twenge, Campbell & Foster (2003), in a major analysis, found that couples with children reported significantly lower marital satisfaction than those without children— particularly during early childhood years. Subsequent studies by other researchers have confirmed that the first three to five years after childbirth are associated with increased conflict, stress and emotional withdrawal.

Divorce frequently affects families while children are still very young. The last detailed ONS figures for England and Wales found that more than one in five children affected by parental divorce were under five, while US research also identifies early childhood as an important period of parental separation and divorce.

Research has also consistently shown that when professional demands spill over into family life, relationship quality also declines. This work–family conflict — defined as the tension arising when work demands interfere with home life — has been strongly associated with lower marital satisfaction, higher emotional exhaustion, and an increased likelihood of separation or divorce. A large body of evidence indicates that long work hours, chronic job stress and emotional unavailability predict poorer relationship outcomes.

One widely cited finding across multiple studies is that perceived partner responsiveness — the feeling that one's spouse is emotionally present and attentive — is one of the strongest predictors of marital stability. Physical provision alone does not substitute for emotional presence.

Family systems research consistently suggests that children benefit most from a stable, cooperative parental alliance. When the marital relationship weakens — whether through emotional neglect, overwork, chronic absence, or unbalanced caregiving — the family system absorbs that strain.

The issue is not that children matter too much. It is that the marriage is quietly deprioritised - often as a result of the physical and emotional requirements of parenting. Importantly, the issue is not whether one partner works more hours, nor whether one stays home. The issue is whether the marriage itself remains intentionally prioritised and protected.

Children do not benefit when the marital relationship is neglected in their name. They benefit from the stability, security and modelling of two adults who remain emotionally connected to one another. A child who senses tension, distance or

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resentment between parents absorbs that instability, even if it is never openly discussed.

Similarly, a spouse who is absent in the name of career — convinced they are 'doing this for the family' — may unintentionally erode the very relationship that makes the family coherent. Financial contribution without being present does not create closeness for the children.

Couples who consciously schedule couple time, maintain emotional intimacy, and protect their partnership alongside parenting and work responsibilities consistently report higher long-term satisfaction than those who assume the relationship will maintain itself.

So before the wedding — and certainly before parenthood — you must discuss and agree:

- How will we protect our relationship once children arrive?
- How will we stay emotionally connected under exhaustion?
- How will we prevent either of us from becoming of secondary importance in our own home?
- If one of us becomes absorbed in work, how will we protect our bond?
- If one of us becomes consumed by caregiving, what can we both do to ensure we stay emotionally connected?

Children need love from both parents. And to provide that, marriages require protection. Prioritising the marriage does not mean neglecting children. It means consciously protecting the adult partnership that gives children their sense of safety.

The marriage must always remain the foundation. Children are part of the structure built on that foundation.

That safety and stability, is what children need the most.

MENTAL HEALTH HISTORY

Mental health is still a massive taboo, in many cultures - despite the fact that there has been a global increase (since COVID) in mental health issues. Especially cases of depression.

Over 280–330 million people worldwide are living with depression, making it one of the most prevalent mental health conditions globally. This affects approximately **5% of all adults**.

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Depression is recognised by the **World Health Organization as one of the leading causes of disability** worldwide, significantly impacting daily functioning, quality of life, and relationships.

During the first year of the **COVID-19 pandemic**, global prevalence of depression (and anxiety) increased by an estimated **25%**, illustrating how stressors like social isolation, economic disruption, and uncertainty can amplify emotional strain.

Women are disproportionately affected, with depression occurring at rates **about 50% higher** than in men. They are at a higher risk of depression after childbirth.

Anyone who has experienced depression knows how debilitating it can be. It becomes particularly challenging and emotionally exhausting when a partner has it.

There are so many other mental health conditions, experiences and relevant family history which deserve your attention - because they can be equally or even more challenging. And it's why those listed below have been included in the 'due diligence' questionnaire:

- Bipolar disorder
- Addiction
- OCD (Obsessive Compulsive Disorder)
- Psychosis
- Personality disorders
- Eating disorders
- Childhood abuse or trauma
- Family psychiatric history

These are not accusations or judgments. And in no way does this discussion stigmatise mental health. They are critically important aspects of all relationships.

You both need to know the mental health history of your future spouse.

PERSONAL CASE STUDY REMOVED FROM THIS SAMPLE

HEALTHY VS UNHEALTHY DISAGREEMENT

As you will discover over the next couple of pages, understanding this topic can have a profound impact on the ultimate success or failure of any marriage.

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No two people agree on everything. When we are young, we are attracted to people just like us - the more mirror-like they are, the more we convince ourselves they are our soulmates. It's only when we get older do we start to realise that it's the compatible differences that add the richness and depth to a long-term relationship.

But with differences, occasional conflict is inevitable. Yet it's not conflict that predicts divorce. It is how couples handle the conflict together.

Avoiding or suppressing disagreement isn't the same thing as resolving it well. Let me explain: without learning how to manage conflict and disagreements, its highly likely that even small disagreements have the potential to cause a break-up.

Healthy disagreement looks like this:

- Speaking about feelings without attacking a partner's character
- Staying focused on one issue at a time
- Listening to understand rather than win
- Taking responsibility for one's part
- Slowing down when emotions escalate
- Both partners apply repair attempts

Repair attempts include:

- Sincere apologies
- Gentle humour
- *"I'm feeling overwhelmed — can we pause?"*
- *"I love and care about you, even when we disagree."*

Strong couples are not conflict-free. They are aware of, and routinely apply, practical and effective repair techniques.

Unhealthy disagreement looks like this

These formulae have been found to predict future divorce 93.6% of the time.

$$w(t+1)=a+r1*w(t)+ihw[h(t)]$$
$$h(t+1)=b+r2*h(t)+iwh[w(t)]$$

These were developed by Professor James Murray, a mathematician from the University of Washington in Seattle. They are based on a 10-year study of 700 couples in collaboration with the psychologist, Doctor John Gottman at the same university. You'll find a detailed explanation of the formulae in *The Seven Principles of Making Marriage Work by* Dr John Gottman and his colleague Nan Silver who are widely regarded as pioneers in the scientific study of modern marriage. Over several decades, Gottman observed thousands of couples in what became known as the ***'Love Lab,'*** analysing not only what partners said to each other, but how they

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said it — tone, facial expression, physiology and repair attempts. His research focused on marriages of many types and backgrounds, seeking measurable predictors of long-term stability versus breakdowns and divorce.

Unlike purely theoretical models, his work is grounded in detailed behavioural observation.

One of Gottman's most influential contributions is his identification of what he called *'The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse'* — four communication patterns that strongly predict marital breakdown if they become habitual:

1. **Criticism** – attacking a partner's character rather than addressing a specific behaviour ("You always…" "You never…").
2. **Contempt** – mockery, sarcasm, eye-rolling, or moral superiority. Gottman identified contempt as the single strongest predictor of divorce.
3. **Defensiveness** – refusing responsibility, counter-attacking, or playing the victim rather than engaging constructively.
4. **Stonewalling** – emotional withdrawal, shutting down, or refusing to engage.

When the above patterns replace respect, appreciation of each others' differences, curiosity, responsibility and attempts to repair, emotional safety evaporates. In many cases, the issue is not the disagreement itself — it is how these factors consistently lead to escalation. Repeated escalation over a long period often leads to emotional distance and in a high proportion of cases - ultimately to divorce.

When conflict repeatedly ends in fear, exhaustion, or one party feeling their voice isn't being heard, the issue is no longer the topic — it becomes the destructive pattern.

Gottman's research also led to a predictive formula often summarised as a **5:1 ratio**: stable marriages maintain at least five positive interactions for every one negative interaction during conflict or disagreements. This "magic ratio" does not mean avoiding criticism altogether, but that positive sentiment, appreciation and repair attempts must significantly outweigh negativity over time.

- Threats or ultimatums
- Rewriting history
- Power struggles
- Silence used as punishment

Finally, on this topic - its worth mentioning that successful long-term marriages are not sustained by 'chemistry' alone. Some people may be addicted to intensity and drama and associate those circumstances as proof of a 'passionate' relationship - while calmness and quietness is perceived as 'boring' by comparison.

A calm, safe environment is what good, long-term relationships are actually based on.

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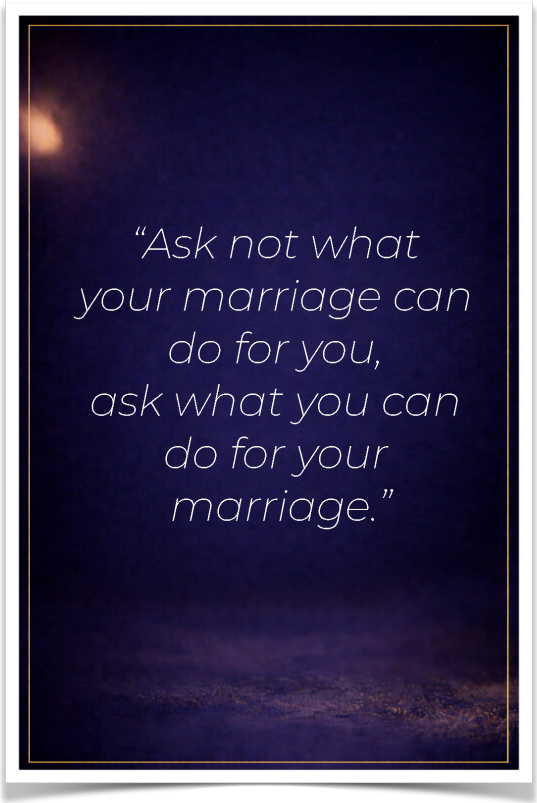

PART II – THE MARRIAGE PREPARATION DUE DILIGENCE QUESTIONNAIRE

Not every question will apply equally to every couple. The purpose is not to answer every question perfectly, but to discover which conversations matter most for your future together.

1. PERSONAL BACKGROUND & FAMILY

(Who are you?)

1. Full name
2. Date of birth
3. Place of birth

FAMILY HISTORY

How your early family experiences may shape your views about marriage

4. In less than 20 words, how would you describe your relationship with your mother, father, brothers and sisters?
5. In one sentence, how would you describe your parents’ relationship?

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6. On a scale of 0 -10, how happily married are/were they?
7. How do you think your perception of your parents' marriage might have affected your own views about marriage?

CHARACTER

8. How do you react when criticised?
9. How do you handle anger?
10. How do you apologise?
11. What do previous colleagues say about you?
12. What personal flaws are you currently working on?

2. FAITH, RELIGIOUS PRACTICE & ISLAMIC EXPECTATIONS

The role beliefs and moral boundaries may play in your married life

13. What role should faith, spirituality or moral philosophy play in daily married life?
14. If your beliefs deepen or change over time, how should that affect the marriage?
15. How should children be raised in relation to religion or moral teaching?
16. Are there moral boundaries (e.g., abortion, assisted dying, political activism) that would create serious conflict for you?
17. When ethical disagreements arise, what authority — if any — would guide resolution?
18. How important is prayer to you?
19. What role should Islamic knowledge play in the home?
20. How should religious disagreements be handled?
21. What Islamic scholars or traditions most influence you?
22. What are your expectations for Ramadan?
23. What Eid traditions are important to you? Why?
24. How important is charitable giving to you? How much and how often?
25. What are your Hajj aspirations?
26. Are there differences in our religious practice that may affect married life?

WALI, CONSENT AND FAMILY APPROVAL

27. Who needs to be involved before Nikah?
28. What role should the Wali play?
29. How should family objections be handled?
30. Are both of us entering this freely, without pressure?

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MODESTY EXPECTATIONS

31.What are your expectations regarding modest dress?
32.What are your expectations regarding social media?
33.What boundaries do you expect with unrelated men/women?

THERE ARE 220 QUESTIONS IN TOTAL

To buy the full version of More Important than the Wedding
click here

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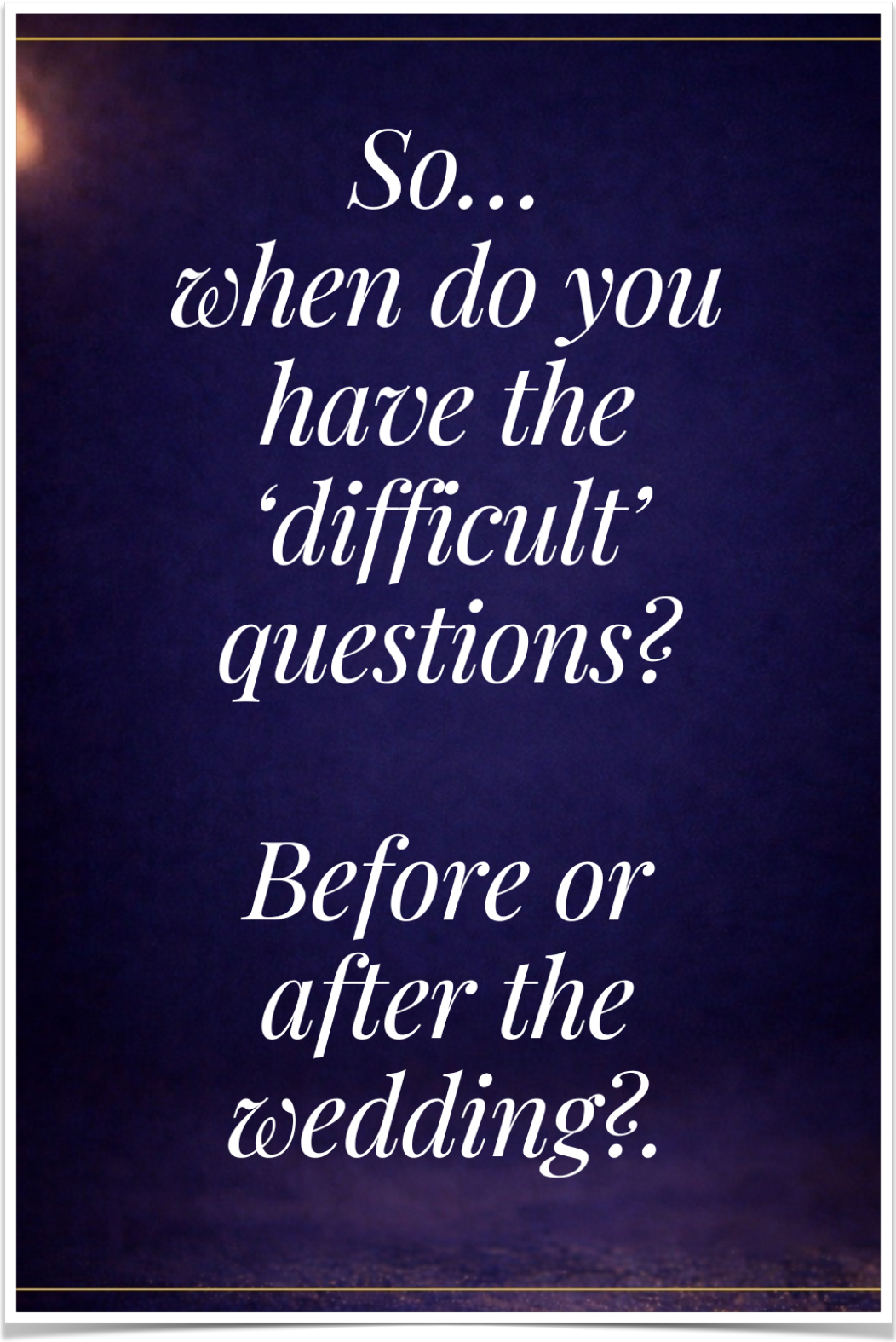

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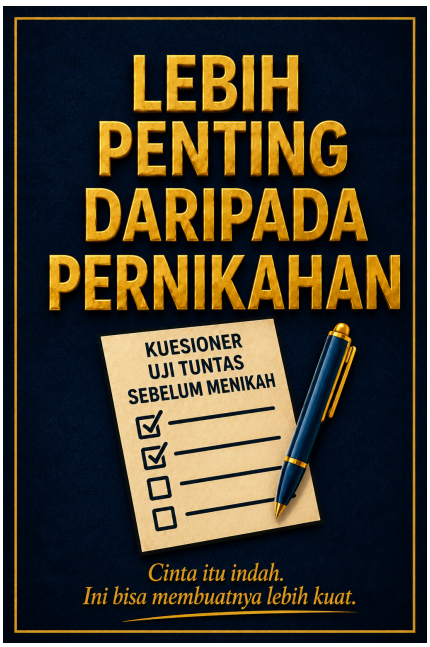
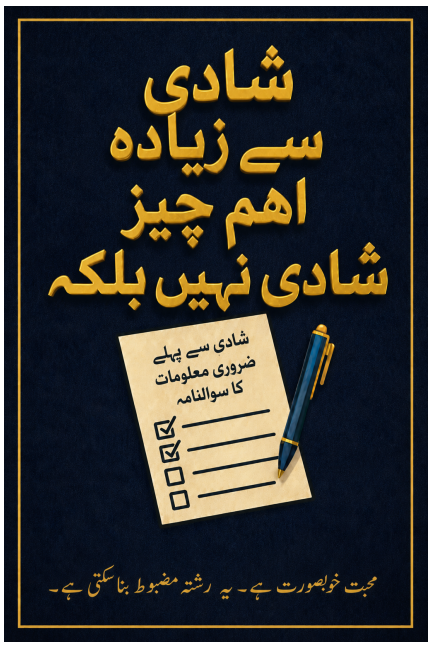
(ALL TRANSLATIONS ALSO INCLUDE THE FULL ORIGINAL ENGLISH TEXT)







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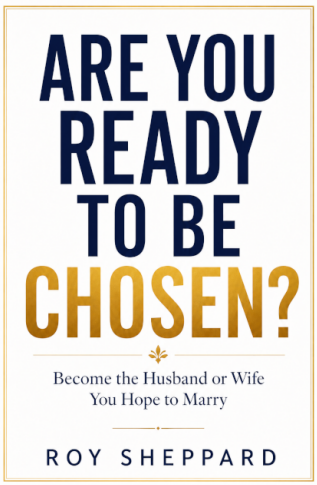
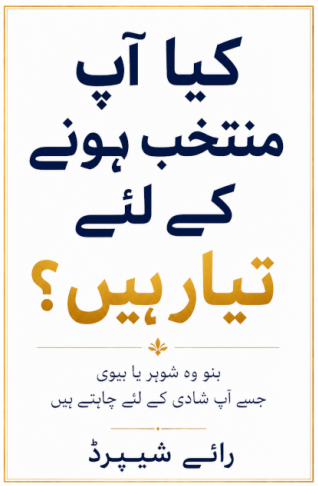
HOW TO PREPARE TO BE A BETTER MUSLIM HUSBAND OR WIFE









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About Author Roy Sheppard



Roy Sheppard began his career as a presenter and interviewer on BBC radio and television, later working internationally as a conference moderator, facilitator and emcee.

Over the course of that career, he has interviewed and questioned thousands of people from an enormous range of backgrounds — in broadcasting, business, healthcare, conferences and private conversations.

One lesson has remained remarkably consistent: the quality of the answers often depends on the quality of the questions.

The best interviews are rarely about asking more questions. They are about identifying the questions that reveal what really matters — the assumptions people make, the things they have not considered, the contradictions they may not have noticed and the subjects that are easier to avoid than discuss.

Roy has drawn on decades of interviewing, facilitation and human observation to create a structured series of questions designed to help couples explore areas that can have a profound impact on married life — before those issues become problems after the wedding.

His professional work has often involved helping people discuss sensitive or difficult subjects without turning the conversation into a confrontation. He has also trained as a hypnotherapist, written extensively about relationships, communication and personal development, and worked with audiences around the world, including extensively across the Middle East and Asia.

His books share a common theme: helping people ask better questions, understand themselves and others more clearly, and make wiser decisions.

More Important Than the Wedding is perhaps the most direct expression of that philosophy:

He is the founder of www.Healthy-Masculinity.org a non-profit project in conjunction with parents to help teen boys become good men. It addresses the challenges facing millions of young men today. While his www.TrueSelfIQ.app builds on his long-standing interest in self-assessment and honest feedback in relationships. Across decades of broadcasting, writing and facilitating, one principle remains constant: clarity reduces conflict, and thoughtful preparation improves lives.

Roy's Online Shop

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