



What are the rights and responsibilities of the couple in a marriage and what should be asked of one's prospective partner?

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ
السَّلَامُ عَلَيْكُمْ وَرَحْمَةُ اللَّهِ وَبَرَكَاتُهُ

The relationship between a husband and wife is one of mutual benefits – companionship, friendship, and meeting each other's physical, spiritual and religious needs. It is also very practical in the sense that it is a contract an agreement between two individuals to discuss and agree on how this 'partnership' will be carried out until the partnership has to come to an end.

There are two responsibilities which are inextricably linked with this contract, referred to as al-nikah, from this relationship; the first is meeting the sexual needs of one another – this is usually discussed from the male point of view as generally his sexual drive is greater than the woman's – however this is a generalisation; and the other is a responsibility on the husband to provide for his wife and children – a home, food, clothing and education according to his financial ability. As this is a contract there are other conditions which can be written and agreed for instance a woman could say that you have to take me on two trips abroad every year, which once agreed is binding. The husband is responsible to ensure that the household is abiding Allah's Laws – for instance praying, fasting etc. However, there are limits to how he can influence his family - beating is not an option. If we take a look into the Prophet's life then we see that there were times when he and one of his wife would have disagreements but he never resorted to violence instead he would separate from them for a while and then returned to them once the matter was resolved.

There are no other responsibilities on the wife like cooking, cleaning or visiting the in-laws – unless they are her blood relatives. In fact if the wife so desired she could ask for a wage to suckle her own child!

However, returning to how I started this fatwa, this is a relationship of care, friendship and kindness – not one of seeking rights but more of fulfilling one's rights. A relationship can start off on a very rocky road if there is little al-kuff or equal status in prospective partners. One has to ensure that the prospective couple understand each other well before committing to the contract of al-nikah.



Questions one can ask are:

1. What role does Islam play in your life?
2. What are your goals in life?
3. What would you expect from your wife/husband?
4. Are we to buy a house or stay with extended family?
5. Are we looking at starting a family immediately?
6. How often do you intend to perform Umra/Hajj?
7. What is your level of knowledge on Islam?

These are just some questions which I have listed in order to give an idea of what type questions can be asked but it is far from exhaustive. Following from al-Nikah it is Sunna to consummate the marriage as this will inevitably bring the couple closer together, however it is not compulsory. One must bear in mind that this is a moment where the wife will hope the husband finds her physically attractive and vice-versa so if that can be shown through some physical action, even if it is not through consummation, then that is advisable – but that must be done taking into consideration the feelings of the other as they may not feel confident or appropriate to do so. Gifts should be exchanged and talking, lots of talking, as it will be the lack of communication which will bring the marriage down if it is not to succeed.

The key point to bear in mind is that this is a life decision which will undoubtedly affect the person's life in this world and the Hereafter. There will never be a bigger decision that a person makes than to decide who to marry – so this needs to be taken with great precaution, thought and seeking spiritual and legal advice. In some cases it is far better to remain single than to put oneself in a situation which can cause serious harm to a person. Having said that if a person finds a compatible person then that will complete half their belief and it will be fulfilling a key Sunna of the Prophets.

والله اعلم وعلمه أحكم وأتم