

'True Love' and the 'Perfect' Life Partner...?

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A SPECIAL INTERVIEW WITH THE WORLDWIDE HEAD OF THE AHMADIYYA MUSLIM COMMUNITY



Amer Safir, London, UK

For some, it happens in college or university. For many, it happens after spending years on online dating apps. For others, it comes about through suggestions made by parents or friends.

One thing is for sure, finding true love is as central to our lives today as it was in the past. The search for a perfect life partner is high up in most people's life goals. And once we discover our perfect match, the highs and lows of relationships consume much of our energy and emotions. It's no wonder that the majority of fiction, movies, songs and television shows have strong themes of love and relationships.

But how do we find our soul mate – the one whom we can deeply connect and spend the rest of our lives with happily?

Of course, the way we search for true love varies hugely, depending on our background, culture, religion or upbringing.

Here in the Western world – and increasingly in more traditional societies as well – the dating scene has evolved in our high-tech digital era, with online dating becoming commonplace. In the UK, over 7 million people are registered on dating sites and it is estimated that one in three relationships starts online. In the USA, 40 million people are said to be using dating websites.

In contrast, in Muslim communities, parents or friends often suggest a suitable match for arranged marriages. This is not to be mistaken with ‘forced marriages,’ where young couples have no choice. Here I am referring to the millions of such marriages where parents, elders or friends, knowing the person well and having experience in life, play a role in helping to suggest a suitable match and where ultimately the couple themselves are the decision makers and make their choices under no compulsion. If they both agree, the couple embark on a relationship, which truly begins after they have been formally bonded in a marriage ceremony. This is not the case only in Muslim communities; rather even now in many Hindu and Sikh societies, friends and family play a prominent role in suggesting matches.

There was a time in the West when it was customary for the male suitor to ask the father for his daughter’s hand in marriage. Interestingly, according to one survey from 2016, 77% of men in the USA asked permission for marriage from the father or parents of the girl. Whilst this indicates the tradition is seemingly alive and well in the West, does it hold anywhere near the same significance as in the past, beyond it being a formality? For those Western couples that do value this custom, it would demonstrate that the influence of parents in their children’s relationships isn’t unique to just Muslim communities.

Dating

In dating, the couple develop an attraction and bond very early on in the relationship, perhaps even a case of ‘love at first sight’. The relationship then develops over time. Sometimes partners choose to move in with one another and live together before making any formal commitment to each other. Couples often have children together. They may later eventually make the decision to get married, though of course, not everyone chooses to do so. In Western Europe marriage rates are falling and having children out of wedlock is on the rise. These rates contrast from those elsewhere; for example, in many traditional Christian communities in the USA as well as in South America. However, what is important to note is that usually where marriage does take place after dating, the couple are usually already deeply invested in their relationship.

Muslim Match-Making

On the other side, in the arranged marriage model, the couple usually do not know each other very well initially. Matches are suggested by looking at mutual interests, and the couple have to ultimately decide if they want to choose the proposed other as their partner. Although they may meet and speak to one another in an appropriate environment before marriage, the couples in this case really truly get to know one another post-marriage. So here, whilst the couple may have a limited understanding of one another prior to marriage, the relationship really progresses *after* marriage and the relationship therefore would seem to develop gradually.

In his book *Matrimonial Issues and Their Solutions*, Hazrat Mirza Masroor Ahmad(aba), Worldwide Head of the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community, has very eloquently and comprehensively outlined the Muslim way of match-making. In Islam, arranged marriages are not just based on luck and guessing who might make the best potential partners. Rather spirituality has a big role to play as well. In addition, due diligence is done in terms of the couple finding out about one another and friends and family give their input in the best interests of the pair. Then the couple engage in serious prayer to supplicate to God to help them decide if the potential partner is suitable to spend the rest of their lives with.

Many have seen dreams which they interpret to mean whether it is good for them to proceed or not. However it is not necessary that everyone will be shown a dream about the path forward; rather sometimes it is a feeling that arises in their heart in answer to their prayers to God which helps them decide. In any case, the connection with God is a cornerstone of the Muslim relationship. As His Holiness explains in his book, at the time of the Islamic Nikah or marriage announcement, verses of the Qur'an are recited five times which mention righteousness and the fear of God. If the couple always remember that God is watching over them, they will never do anything to hurt one another and will always be honest with each other. In addition, Islam's teachings emphatically emphasise how husbands and wives should treat each other with great love, forgiveness and kindness. The Holy Prophet(sa), the founder of Islam, was reported to have said the 'best among you is he who is best to his wife.'

The Objective

My subject of interest here is how the concept of 'true love' fits within these differing frameworks of courtship – on the one side dating and love marriages – and on the other side, arranged marriages. I wanted to explore how 'true love' is measured by these varying traditions. It was fascinating to me that there are such contrasting understanding of the nature of love itself.

To understand the philosophy of finding true love in Islam, I was deeply honoured and privileged to have the opportunity to ask these questions to His Holiness, Hazrat Mirza Masroor Ahmad(aba), Worldwide Head of the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community, Fifth

Khalifa (Caliph) of the Promised Messiah(as). The Ahmadiyya Muslim Community believe that its founder, Hazrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad(as), was the Promised Messiah and Mahdi (Guided One) awaited by the followers of all religions.

In recent times we have published in *The Review of Religions* incredibly insightful interviews of His Holiness, Hazrat Mirza Masroor Ahmad(aba) on the topics of cannabis, mental health and the hijab ban in schools, which offer a truly unique perspective on these very topical issues. What is remarkable is the manner in which His Holiness combines a very vast range of spiritual and secular knowledge with logic and rationality.

The Review of Religions is exceptionally grateful to His Holiness for giving up so much of his precious time from his hugely busy schedule to enlighten us on this very relevant issue. We hope that readers will derive huge benefit from the answers of His Holiness.

INTERVIEW WITH HIS HOLINESS, HAZRAT MIRZA MASROOR AHMAD(ABA), WORLDWIDE HEAD OF THE AHMADIYYA MUSLIM COMMUNITY

Amer Safir: Your Holiness, I have read your book *Matrimonial Issues and Their Solutions* and took detailed notes. Your Holiness has covered marriage and relationships in Islam in immense detail. Your Holiness covers three categories – spirituality, reflected by what His Holiness said that at the time of Islamic marriage announcement, the Qur’anic verse on righteousness is recited and that the couple should always ensure they maintain their connection with their Creator. Second, your Holiness spoke on morals, such as always being honest, kind and forgiving to your partner. Finally, your Holiness covered practical aspects such as guidance on how to adjust with in-laws and similar advice.

Your Holiness, from my humble understanding of your Holiness’ book, in the Islamic concept there is a framework that needs to be adopted for successful relationships, covering morals, spirituality and practicality.

Your Holiness, my question is with regards to finding ‘true love’ according to Islam. In the West relationships often begin from a peak right away. People say they have found ‘love at first sight’ and then their relationships continue in this manner. In contrast, in Muslim relationships, the couples often don’t know one another as well and the relationship would appear to develop gradually.

Your Holiness, how does Islam define ‘true love’? Is ‘love at first sight’ just a fantasy? Or, if I may respectfully ask, how does the concept of love in the West fit into the framework of Islam that His Holiness has outlined in his book on relationships? Is the Western concept of love possible in the Islamic framework, or is it just a fantasy?

Hazrat Mirza Masroor Ahmad, Worldwide Head of the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community(aba): ‘There is an anecdote of a very beautiful girl, with long, flowing hair, who was fair and in pristine health. A boy became deeply infatuated with her and

proposed marriage. The father of the girl was fiercely against this union and told the boy, "You do not truly love my daughter; rather you only love her outward beauty and features."

The boy insisted, "No, no, this is not the case; I do truly love her." And so the father decided to give his daughter a treatment that resulted in her falling very ill. Her stomach became upset and she became very frail, scrawny, and sickly. The father then cut locks from the girl's hair with scissors. In short, the girl's physical and outer appearance fell into a terrible condition. Then the father said to the boy: "Now look here, this is my daughter. Do you still love her? If you do love her, then by all means go ahead, and marry her." Upon this, the boy started to offer excuses to not proceed. Thus, the father placed all the girl's hair he had cut off into a bowl. He then said to the boy, "Now that all her hair has been cut and her apparent beauty has been removed, you say that you do not love her. So here, take this bowl with her hair and have all of these things, because these are the features that you really 'love'. So, go now, and take all of this with you."

This was merely superficial love. What happens here in society is that the morals and character of a person are aspects that are demoted and ignored instead of being the focus of affection. Whereas, as a poet has once written, the material and outward features of the world are only temporary and fleeting and will fade away and love for them is short-lived. This is not real love. Therefore, one needs to develop such love which is true love.

It is observed that once the son of Hazrat Ali(ra) asked him, 'Do you love me?' Hazrat Ali(ra) replied, 'Yes'. His son then asked, 'Do you love God?' Hazrat Ali(ra) responded, 'Yes.' His son asked, 'How can these two loves co-exist?' Hazrat Ali(ra) explained, 'It is my love for Allah that created within me my love for other human beings.'

In this case, love for another person becomes secondary and the love of God takes precedence and becomes dominant. Indeed this is *spiritual* love.

Further, we find, for example, in the Holy Qur'an, Allah the Almighty has given permission for men to marry four wives, under certain circumstances and conditions. However, Allah has also taught us to be just with all our wives. Allah the Almighty is aware that it is not possible for one to love everyone exactly equally, as often, it is natural to love one more than the other. However, it is the outward expression of affection that should be equal towards all of them. You should equally give one day each to spend with every wife. You should equally treat all the children from every wife in the same way.

In short, one should be mindful of the way they express their feelings and sentiments. Love emanates from the heart; however, one should not express more love for one wife over the other, as obviously, this would simply break their heart. Allah the Almighty is All-Aware of this aspect.

Once Hazrat Aishah(ra) [wife of the Holy Prophet(sa)], said to the Holy Prophet(sa), regarding Hazrat Khadijah(ra) [first wife of the Holy Prophet(sa) who had passed away] that she was an old woman, so why did he reminisce about her, when Allah the Almighty had granted him younger, more beautiful wives? The Holy Prophet(sa) told Hazrat Aishah(ra) to refrain from making such comments because he said “Hazrat Khadijah(ra) supported me when the whole world shunned me. And Allah the Almighty granted me children only through her”.

So here, we observe that for the Holy Prophet(sa), love of Allah the Almighty reigned supreme. The Holy Prophet^{sa} especially regarded the fact that Allah the Almighty’s Grace was first manifested through Hazrat Khadijah^{ra}. She was the first to accept him and also through her, the Holy Prophet’s(sa) progeny were born.

Whilst the Holy Prophet(sa) greatly loved Hazrat Aishah(ra), some level the allegation that he married her for her young age. Yet we observe that when once Hazrat Aishah(ra) passed a negative remark about another wife, the Holy Prophet(sa) was quite displeased. He said, ‘Aishah, if what you just said was placed into the sea, the water in the sea would become bitter.’ The Holy Prophet(sa) meant that Hazrat Aishah(ra) should have refrained from passing such comments. Thus, the Prophet did not simply agree with everything Hazrat Aishah(ra) said.

We find another example which is not directly connected to this but is relevant to the subject.

An elderly wife of the Holy Prophet(sa), [Hazrat Maimoona(ra)], passed away 50 years after the demise of the Holy Prophet(sa). She had requested, before passing away, that after her death, she should be buried in the exact same spot just outside of Makkah where she had first met the Holy Prophet(sa) [on a journey] and had been proposed to [by] him. If it were true that there was a huge difference in how he treated his elderly wives, then this elderly wife (Maimoona(ra)), would not have reminisced about the Holy Prophet(sa) and harboured these sentiments of deep affection for him, even after a 50-year period. Yet she truly loved the Holy Prophet(sa).

What was the basis for this deep love and affection she had for him? It was due to the loving treatment of the Holy Prophet(sa) towards her. Despite being a widow and from another nation, he conferred on her status, love and respect, to such a degree, that recalling the Prophet’s(sa) love, before she passed away, she resolved that she ultimately wanted to return and be laid to rest at the exact same meeting place where she first met with the Holy Prophet(sa). This is *true love*.

Amer Safir: How would Your Holiness describe the ‘love at first sight’ concept of today as opposed to arranged marriages?

Hazrat Mirza Masroor Ahmad(aba), Worldwide Head of the Ahmadiyya Muslim

Community: The rest [of] what we see described as love in the world today is mere fantasy. It is fantasy – the manner in which love marriages or relationships based on this type of ‘love’ take place. It is often alleged that ‘arranged’ marriages should not take place. Yet 65% of marriage breakups are from among the love marriages, whereas arranged marriages have a lower rate of breakups.

In the UK, we see Prince Charles married Lady Diana. Yet he left her and pursued another relationship. Prince Andrew married Sarah Ferguson, but that too finished after a few years.

So what is this type of ‘love’ and what is the outcome of it?

We find further evidence for this notion supported by data and statistics. It is alleged that domestic violence is rampant amongst Muslims. Yet in the UK, Germany and elsewhere in the West, we find a large number of cases of domestic abuse amongst the native populations of these countries. (In the UK an estimated 1.3 million women in one year ending March 2018 experienced domestic abuse according to the Crime Survey for England and Wales and cited in the UK Government’s Office of National Statistics. In Germany, one woman is killed every three days by a partner or ex-partner, according to statistics revealed by Germany’s Women Affairs Minister, Franziska Giffey, who called it “unimaginable order of magnitude”, reported in Deutsche Welle, Germany’s state-owned broadcaster. In the USA, on average, nearly 20 people per minute are physically abused by an intimate partner. During one year, this is equal to 10 million women and men, according to a report by the National Coalition Against Domestic Violence.)

This only reflects those cases that are reported or have been registered, but so many others may not even report their cases. Even if we say, for argument’s sake, that the percentages in domestic abuse are the same between Muslim and non-Muslim relationships, how can we lay the blame on religion when the same things are happening here in these countries?

The Holy Prophet(sa) guided us to adopt *taqwah* (righteousness). This advice was not just for young men, but also for young girls. Secondly, the Holy Prophet(sa), when advising Muslims, said that people usually marry looking at outward beauty, for the status of the other family or for the girl’s wealth. However, a true believer looks at whether the girl is righteous and pious.

Amer Safir: Your Holiness, are couples allowed to see each other before marriage according to Islam?

Hazrat Mirza Masroor Ahmad(aba), Worldwide Head of the Ahmadiyya Muslim

Community: One may find out more details about the family and their conduct at home.

Permission has also been granted to see each other's appearance. Once in the time of the Holy Prophet(sa) a boy came for a proposal and asked if he could see the girl. Her father was outraged and said 'who is he to ask to see my daughter' and said he would beat him. Yet, when the daughter learnt that the Holy Prophet(sa) had given permission for a meeting, she immediately stepped forward. The boy in response lowered his head down. In response to this, the girl said she unconditionally accepted his proposal of marriage.

Amer Safir: Your Holiness, what is Islam's solution to the age before marriage, when, for example, youth can have strong carnal desires?

Hazrat Mirza Masroor Ahmad, Worldwide Head of the Ahmadiyya Muslim

Community(aba): It is a natural law of nature – which we find even among animals – that when people reach an age of maturity they think of forming physical relationships. Allah the Almighty has ordained an age of maturity or puberty. Islam teaches that instead of one indulging in indecency and immorality, marry at such an age. We observe that in these societies, perhaps 70% of younger women or girls have already developed relationships with boys – many issues arise as a result of this that lead to problems later. This is why Islam says to carry out the *nikah* (formal marriage in Islam) at an earlier age – yet upon this it is objected that we are promoting paedophilia.

Amer Safir: Your Holiness, we've been asked this question in the past about the view on people who perform acts on themselves like masturbation for pleasure – which has been connected with pornography and is rampant in society. What is Islam's take on this?

Hazrat Mirza Masroor Ahmad(aba), Worldwide Head of the Ahmadiyya Muslim

Community: Generally, information on medical websites today often states that to perform this act may increase a man's ability or strength or that it makes no difference. However, physicians of previous times would say otherwise and that it causes weakness, and this in fact is the reality. People who perform this act suffer because when they then try to perform naturally, they are unable to do so as they lack any desire or they have premature ejaculation.

Secondly, ask anyone who does this act and they will tell you they will be imagining someone else whilst carrying out masturbation. They have to fantasise about another person during this act to incite their desire. This is why the Promised Messiah(as) has spoken of the 'adultery of the mind'. This is when a person fantasises about someone else who they can never have access to and therefore, the only way to further that desire is to fantasise even more. This is 'adultery of the mind' and this is why Islam has forbidden us from indulging in such immoralities and indecent acts.

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