

English Translation:

The issue of knowing a person...If a young man, let's suppose, decided to marry a specific woman; if he knows her, [but] not her family, he goes and talks to her directly regarding marriage. He proposes to her. Then she delivers the proposal to her family. After that, a visit is arranged between his parents and hers, to enable the man to come with his family and meet the woman's since he has only seen her. Usually he would meet her at work, university, or some similar place.

If the man does not know the woman but is acquainted with her brother or father, he goes to her brother or father and proposes to her officially. From there, things will progress and more visits would be exchanged between the families . . . etc. after an agreement is reached, there is a private visit that no one would know of because, as we say, nothing has happened yet, they [man and woman] are still on the shore¹. The family visit is arranged for both sides to meet each other. Then they decide the next step. Perhaps the woman's family would not like the man for a given reason.

Certainly, a woman has the right to accept or refuse. If she rejects, she has to say why. For instance, she would say that he does not have a college degree or he is not employed...there are many reasons. But it has to be good reason. For example, she cannot say that she does not want to marry this man because of his dark skin, because this is a silly reason as we say.

After that, there is an engagement between both sides. The engagement period is specified for them to know each other since he will be a future husband. As I have said, because usually most Iraqi men and women have never been involved in previous relationships prior to marriage, engagement period becomes a very beautiful thing which they appreciate for the rest of their lives.

Engagement period is not limited to a specific time length. Some people are engaged for a month, two, or three; others may be engaged for years. There is no specific timetable for it, but we say the longer the engagement lasts, the more problems appear. The shorter the engagement is, the better it is because if both parties are ready, then why not?

They [man and woman] take advantage of the engagement to get ready for the wedding. The wedding is usually decided by the fiancé and his fiancée who decide the date, the way, and the place. I mean some people celebrate the wedding in party halls, others celebrate at home, his or hers, depending on the area, the guests in addition to several factors. Yet, the last word is the bride and her fiancé.

¹ An expression that means nothing has happened yet

Preparing for the wedding includes buying new clothes such as a wedding dress, and a wedding suit for the groom, also gold pieces which are the *mahar*². The *mahar* could be money and it can include gold pieces such as the engagement ring and another pieces. It depends on the financial situation of the groom. If he comes financially prepared for marriage, they [bride and groom] buy many things, maybe expensive ones. But if he is not ready or his financial situation is okay, they try to minimize their expenses.

One day before the wedding, there is the *hennah* for both the man and woman. *Hennah* is one of the Iraqi traditions. It is [like] a bachelor/bachelorette party, as we say. The bride wears a beautiful gown, and invites her friends. It's a women's party. Her friends put henna in her hands. It is a very nice ceremony. The same thing goes for the groom. He invites his friends and his brothers if he has any, his neighbors also come. It is also a party for young men only. It's a bachelor party as I mentioned that prepares him for the wedding.

The following day is the wedding day. The wedding celebration is a very nice ceremony in fact, and people feel proud of it because it's a once-in-a-life-time event that does not happen every day. Marriage for most Iraqis happens once in a life time, and that's why they celebrate it joyfully.

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² *Mahar*: Dowry.