**What We Can Learn From Arranged Marriages**

Posted: 06/29/2011 4:13 pm EDT Updated: 08/29/2011 5:12 am EDT

On a vacation last year, I met a woman who was the bride of an arranged marriage. We were at a resort in a Japanese Tepanyaki restaurant, the kind where you and fellow guests are seated around a table watching the chef cook your meal in front of you. People who are basically strangers to you become dinner companions and you strike up easy conversations. A pretty, young Indian woman was seated next to me and I found out that she and her new husband were on their honeymoon.

After dinner, her husband excused himself and as he left the table he stooped down and planted a loving kiss on his wife's shoulder. We all smiled at this newlywed affection and one of the women present asked how long the bride and her husband had known each other before they were married. The bride's answer was unexpected.

"We met only once, last year at the bride-viewing, and then met again a week before the wedding."

Seeing our surprise, she explained what a bride-viewing was, (prospective bride and groom see each other for the first time and can approve or disapprove their parents' choice), and went on to tell us that the marriage had been arranged by the parents of her husband and her own last year. The arrangement had been based on similarities in their traditional and cultural backgrounds, religion, schooling, family, and financial equity.

"*What about love?"* asked a man, who was celebrating a five year anniversary with his wife at the resort.

*"Love will come. We are so well-matched that the affection will automatically follow as it has for generations of traditional couples in our culture,"* she smiled.

Falling in love after getting married? Now there is food for thought and it seems to be something western societies never consider.

First we need to emphasize that an arranged marriage is not the same as a forced marriage. In a forced marriage a girl or woman is basically "sold" to someone who she did not willingly choose. Arranged marriage takes the feelings and thoughts of the woman and man into consideration and the final choice is hers and his.

There are cultures where arranged marriages are not only accepted but deemed a perfectly normal part of life. While most of us feel that love is the one major ingredient we absolutely must have before we take the marital plunge, the statistics of successful marriages say that sameness of up-bringing, monetary equality, background, spiritual beliefs, and tradition and culture make the most satisfying and enduring relationships. It gives couples a common ground of reference. Love seems to be a secondary consideration. In other words, falling in love with someone who has a very different background and upbringing doesn't necessarily make the most successful of partnerships.

There may be some truth to this theory. We can prove it by the people we dated and with whom we believed we were madly in love. Looking back at broken relationships and even broken engagements, we can see, in retrospect, that the person we thought we couldn't live without is the person we are glad we didn't marry. If we are honest with ourselves, we concede that we really had nothing in common with that person.

Many cultures and religions adhere to the practice of arranged marriages as part of their belief system. Parents look out for their children by trying to make the best possible match they can, even down to the exact details of housing, money, continued post-graduate education, and who brings what to the marriage. The duties of husband and wife are stipulated much like a prenuptial agreement, except the notion of divorce is not mentioned since the partners are committed to making the marriage work. The marriage contract is treated the same as a business partnership.

The system has always been a prominent and accepted part of society and was designed to keep money and land in the family by marrying a person of equal worth and social position. No surprises, no shock, everything was spelled out before the ceremony. Each partner knows what they want from the other and each knows what they are required to bring to the relationship.

I have known several couples who have successful arranged marriages. One is an Orthodox Jewish couple. Another couple is Indian, and while both husband and wife were well-educated and successful in their respective careers, they still felt that the arranged marriage was the way to go when it came time to find a spouse.

The bride at our table said it quite appropriately:

*"My husband is a good man, responsible and caring. My parents approve of him and I trust their judgment. Finally the decision was ours. He and I made the choice to marry. We are both university educated, mature young people, and we know what is expected of us. We will treat each other well. Love will definitely follow for us the same as it did for both our parents."*

We can all learn from that statement.