

Building an Authentic and Compassionate Marriage

Raidah Shah Idil interviews holistic therapist Hafsa Hassan who shares her advice on how to have an authentic and compassionate marriage.

Hafsa Hasan is a holistic therapist and a mother of five, based in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. She has been trained in both Eastern and Western healing arts by her mentors. Her crafts include the use of herbs, homeopathy and hands-on and somatic body/mind approaches to healing. I first met her at a spoken word event and, later, at a weekend holistic health

retreat organised with her mentor, Hakim Archuletta. I interviewed Hafsa about what it takes to build an authentic and compassionate marriage. Here are her insightful answers:

1. What does it mean to have an authentic and compassionate marriage?

The first thing we want to understand is what we mean by living

authentically and what we mean by compassion. Compassion literally means 'with feeling' or 'with suffering', implying our ability to feel what another person is going through with empathy and sympathy. In Arabic, the term most commonly used for compassion is 'rahmah', which has other connotations as well, including a sense of mercy. Being genuine and authentic, on the other hand, is more about self-knowledge and living and expressing one's true self as it is, from the innermost heart and core to the outermost physical without layers of falseness. An authentic and compassionate marriage would mean two people who firstly know themselves in a very deep and meaningful way and then are able to relate to each other with empathy.

2. What are some common myths about having an authentic marriage?

The most common myth seems to be that it's not something we need to work very hard at. That love is all you need or, in some circles, there is the idea that being religious or spiritual should be enough to ensure we don't have any problems in marriage. The reality is that it is in relationships, especially with our spouse, our messiest psychological wounds and behaviours are triggered. Baggage from our early or past experiences of love, acceptance, attachment are often unknowingly brought out in marriage, where our deepest concepts of love and attachment will naturally emerge and any unresolved issues are triggered. It is only through self-knowledge - recognising what is happening in our own body-mind-self and then working with whatever comes up - that we are able to remove the layers or veils to being our genuine, authentic self. Likewise, empathy for our spouse as they go through the same process can bring compassion to a relationship where previously there was misunderstanding.

3. What are some practical steps which husbands and wives can implement in order to have a more authentic and compassionate marriage?

For both spouses, self-work is the most important thing. Know yourself, know your body. What is your body telling you? The next time you are triggered by your spouse and also the next (or last) time they made you happy, pause for a second from your thoughts and instead feel what is happening in your body. What sensations, feelings and emotions are arising? This may sound odd, but it is the key to self-knowledge. As we work through our own issues and feelings, either on our own or with a trusted advisor, we will eventually arrive at a more authentic sense of self. Compassion for our partner will naturally follow. This is the basis for an authentic and compassionate marriage. This is not a prescription just for failing relationships, but for all of us to bear in mind! For example, if you dislike something that your spouse does, stop and feel what it is about that action that you dislike. What is your reaction telling you about yourself? It may be that in some cases, it is your own issue that is being triggered. Are you unknowingly being clingy, controlling, evasive, jealous, petty, taking the moral high ground, etc.? If so, just recognising that can be enough. If not, empathy may be required and, of course, appropriate communication. Either way, effective communication needs to be learnt and practised by both parties. This is something to work at on a daily basis. Communication is an art, essential to marriage, and there is a saying that goes 'to love is to listen'. Feel, process your own inner wounds and traumas, empathise deeply with your partner, communicate

and listen!

Whatever it is, don't underestimate the importance of expressing yourself and listening to your partners. If you think your wife is too emotional, try and focus on what she is trying to communicate. If you think your husband lacks emotion, see what his body language and behaviour is telling you instead.

Empathy includes knowing what is important to your partner. Men face a lot of pressure in this day and age to be hands-on fathers and this is an absolutely wonderful thing for the family. But whilst there is a growing trend that recognises that women need a lot of support in raising a family, there seems to be less recognition for what support men may need in a relationship. It may be that if wives get involved or show interest in their husband's work and hobbies the way they would like men to be involved in the household, children and their work, compassion will become easier to practise.

5. How can a couple maintain an authentic marriage in the face of crises like the death of a family member or bankruptcy?

Crises and trials become difficult to negotiate when we are not in a good place to start with, before the crisis hits. Without a grounded sense of self, a sudden loss or crisis can completely throw us. Grief and loss are natural life processes and we are designed by God to be able to process and deal with these trials over time. However, if we haven't built up the emotional, mental and relationship resources to help us through difficult times, we may find it harder to bounce back from our loss. A trial can be a means for couples to come closer as they invest more resources, time, care and empathy in each other - though depending on where they are at in their personal growth, they may not be able to do this.

6. How can a couple maintain an authentic marriage during the busy rush of raising children?

Raising children doesn't have to be seen as a busy rush and a strain on the marriage. Naturally, parenthood will change people and create huge new demands, but with enough self-knowledge, empathy and communication there is no reason it should be an obstacle to a fulfilled marriage. Children have much to teach us about love, joy and communication. We just have to allow them to teach us, not suppress in them what seems uncomfortable to us, and we will learn so much about ourselves! Also, we can learn about authenticity and compassion from children and that can only enhance, strengthen and beautify a marriage.

Hafsa Hasan has her website at www.elementsnaturaloasis.com and for more information about her mentor Hakim Archuletta, please visit www.hakimarchuletta.com.

Raidah Shah Idil is a writer, poet and counselling student based in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. Her work has been published in The Feminist Wire, Daily Life, Lip Mag and Venture Beat. Her debut double-featured novel, "Finding Jamilah and The Story of Yusuf" was published by MyLegacy Publications in early 2014. Her poetry has been published in the 'Armed With Only Our Souls' anthology by NY poet, Caitis Meissner. Visit her at www.raidahshahidil.com.