

Second Marriages... Never say Never Again the UK

By Shreeti Rajdev



The institution of marriage amongst the Asian community has evolved significantly over the years. There was a time when marriages were arranged and a divorce was unheard of, so the question of remarriage would never arise (unless perhaps a party had become widowed).

Historically, if a traditional arranged marriage did not work out, leaving the marriage was not an option. There was far too much stigma attached to a divorce. As time moved on, there were occasions when a divorce would take place in situations where, for example, a party was in an abusive or violent relationship and staying in the marriage was thought to be worse than the stigma of a divorce.

Divorces in the Asian community have increased over the years. In today's modern times, particularly in the West, there is now a more acceptable element of "choice" in whether to stay in an unhappy marriage or leave.

After a first marriage has ended in divorce, many people vow they would never walk down the aisle (or in the case of an Indian wedding, walk round the sacred fire) again. The last thing they want is a new long term relationship.

There are others that will propel into a second marriage without ever having fully "healed" from the breakdown of the first. This can lead to unresolved feelings of anger, hurt or resentment being carried into the second marriage. This cannot be a good starting point for a new relationship.

Research has shown that partners who wait to gain a sense of themselves and what they are looking for have a much better chance of making a second commitment work. "It's important that they're not just getting remarried to be married again" says Constance Ahrons, a San Diego psychologist and therapist specialising in divorce and remarriage.

"It is important to think of the second marriage as a separate relationship to the first, and understand there is no overlap of experience with the first", say the clinical psychologist Pauline Rennie-Peyton. "Subconsciously, the experience of first time failure will be strong, however optimistic you feel about the new relationship".

A pause between a first and second marriage provides time for people to identify what is important to them, both in themselves and in their future partner. Partners who wait to gain a sense of themselves and what they are looking for have a much better chance of making a second commitment work.

Second marriages undoubtedly have their own challenges – children can be reluctant to accept a step-parent; one spouse may be paying to support children of their previous marriage or be recovering from a pay out from a divorce settlement.

However, many believe that marriage is better the second time around. One of the prime reasons for this is that people learn not to repeat past mistakes. Entering a new marriage with wisdom and maturity increases the chance of its success.

Clinical psychologist Dr. Michael Mantell believes second marriages can be more successful than the first since couples have typically matured, learned from any mistakes they made and taken stock of exactly what they are looking for second time around.

"They understand their mistakes, typically they have spent longer getting to know their future second spouse, they are more open and willing to develop new routines and they are not blinded by love", he says.

Reports show that second marriages are generally more successful than first marriages as couples who get married for the second time are invariably older than those marrying for the first time. Dr. Mantell states "often they are older and wiser, and understand that falling in love doesn't last – that choosing to love every day is what makes a relationship last".

People in second marriages may have an increased insight and self-

awareness. Having gone through the pain of separation and divorce, there may be more motivation to work through problems and save the marriage. Younger couples in a first marriage may find it easier to walk out and move on rather than do whatever it takes to resolve conflicts.

Some reports suggest the increased affluence of couples entering second marriages was cited as one reason why older couples had a better likelihood of making their marriage work over younger newlyweds who were often faced with new, demanding, careers and were struggling to pay bills and raise children.

As we get older, we invariably get better at life and get better at love too, learning that part of married life should involve time together, alone, without children or smart phones. Reports suggest a second marriage teaches you how to keep checks on your relationship, in good times and bad. Janice Hillier, a clinical psychologist, says "You get better at identifying when things are wrong, and act more quickly to resolve them".

You learn to deal constructively with big conflicts and to let go of smaller ones. Put simply, you communicate better. People in second marriages have, at the very least, a basic understanding of effective communication and conflict resolution.

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