

MODULE 5

Class title: Nikah/ The Peela Jora – part 1 (1st part of a 2 lesson series)

Aim of lesson: To spread awareness regarding unnecessary pre wedding rituals and their consequences in the society.

Category: Popular culture

Class Format: Power Point Presentation

(Greeting to students) *Assalam alaikum wa Rahmatullahi wa Barakatuh*

(*Ta'awudh*) *Aodhubillahi min AsShaytanirRajeem*

(*Tasmiyah*) *Bismillahir Rahmanir Raheem*

(*Du'a*) *Rabbishrahli sadri wa yassirli amri wahlul uqdatum millisani yafqahu qawli*(Surah At Ta-Ha 20: Verse 25-28)

Slides 1 -3:

How many of you attended weddings this winter? I don't think I have attended many weddings in a very long time. I had thought of taking a completely different class today but yesterday I sat in front of the television to see what is going on around me and what I saw was amazing; all these different morning shows were celebrating weddings and apparently it's all very common. I thought that since it was the wedding season and I saw something like a set from the movies with yellow colour everywhere, I thought let's talk about this today.

Tell me about the weddings that you attended; did anybody attend any *mehndis* or *mayuns* (pre-wedding functions of traditional Hindu origins)? Those are the sort of weddings we are generally used to; they begin with *dholkis* (pre-wedding song & dance parties). The weddings that we see around us start off with a *dholki* and believe it or not there are disco *dholkis* as well.

I actually attended a wedding reception at a lovely venue and they had a huge gorgeous marquee but I was shocked out of my wits because they had a catwalk going to the stage. The bride and groom entered, the lights went dim and then they had these spotlights on the catwalk on the bride and groom and behind them there was somebody holding the bride's *ghararah* (traditional Indian outfit). Then they went to the stage and there were these disco lights and then the lights went off and there were smoke machines; it was amazing. I just wanted to share that with you because it was incredible; I had never seen a wedding like that before. Slides 4- 8:

So it starts early with the *dholkis* and then you have the *mayun* where everything is colour coordinated; yellow is the colour of the *mayun*. Then you have all these decorations and some people go really overboard.

These are real pictures. And now we have wedding planners too. To top it off, nowadays the girls have stopped wearing *dupattas* (scarves) – instead the boys have started to!

Slides 9- 11:

For weeks and weeks you see these people practicing their dances. Like she said (student commented earlier) they danced at the *mehndi* for three hours; so if they danced for three hours, they must have had thirty hours of practice before that! And then you have this bride wearing yellow clothes and people do all kinds of *rasams* (rituals) on her and the decoration and the rituals are mind boggling.

Every year it seems like it's going one notch higher in terms of the kind of stuff that is available. On one of the television shows, the lady said that if the bride and groom don't want *mithai* (for the *mehndi rasam* where they put *mithai* in your mouth), she had these cupcakes made like yellow roses which she showed and I was stupefied. You know the regular tiny cupcakes are for fifty rupees or so but that seemed like one cupcake for at least a hundred rupees.

Slides 12- 18:

Then the *mehndi* happens and you see all of this paraphernalia; this is old fashioned by today's standards; these days it's much fancier.

The bride's side takes the groom's presents to the venue and the groom's people take the bride's presents and not only do they bring it but there's a big show about it. I remember years ago - this has been happening for a long time by the way - somebody was telling me that when the groom's family got the bride's gifts, they picked up all the outfits one by one to show everybody, they even picked up the underclothes to show to everyone (because it was from 'abroad', and in those days people didn't travel as much as we do today); so they had this beautiful lingerie and the lady who was displaying the *ghararah* also showed the lingerie with it!

People go through these extremes without realizing how stupid and foolish they are being. And then you have this; as you can see the kind of stuff is according to your socio economic status - look at this one and look at this one. Whoever can afford whatever tries to go all the way and with the wedding planners, you forget about all this boring stuff and you have these really sophisticated things. People even match the bride's outfit with just about everything you can think of; the flowers, the *marquee*, the invitations, the everything.

Slides 19- 30:

And then comes the wedding day. There's the decoration of the car and the decoration of the houses; apart from the decoration of the wedding hall or lawn!! A wedding outfit itself costs five lacs or so. What about the jewellery.... I went to the jeweller's some time back; I generally don't wear gold jewellery so I had no idea of the prices, and there were these tiny little tops that I could barely see and they were for forty five thousand rupees. I almost fainted. They were really small but solid gold. The cost of evening make up these days is twenty four thousand rupees;

that's evening makeup, not bridal. Bridal would be maybe two or three times more. What happens to the makeup that the bride has on; does she keep wearing it? Is it an investment? These are all pictures from Pakistan by the way. Look at the colour coordination; maybe the bride was wearing lilac or purple so they have everything to match it.

Then of course, let's not forget food. I went to a wedding where there were at least twelve different types of desserts. How many people do you think are invited to weddings? Just about everybody you can think of is invited, so that means that much food.

Slides 31- 32:

Then they even have goodie bags; that's the new fad. When I got married there was no concept of giving goodie bags to people who come to a wedding; they were only given out at children's parties. In fact someone was telling me about a wedding the other day where gold coins were given out ! A gold coin for each guest as a giveaway. Even then, people complained – some said if they could give one, they could give two. Anyways, gold coins or chocolates or whatever you have, all sort of stuff is presented as giveaways these days. Is there anybody in this room who has not attended a wedding like this?

Slides 33-38:

Now let's consider the other side and I'm not talking about the *deeni* aspect right now. Let's just look at the social consequences of weddings like this. Who is paying for all this? The single wedding outfit which costs lacs, cupcakes, jewellery... One of the problems is that there are so many functions; start with the *dholkis* - or just *mayun*, *mehndi*, *shadi*, *valima*. There are at least four. Can you imagine the *kharcha* (cost) of each and every one of them? The outfit, the food, the decorations; the flowers, not to forget the video maker and photographer. So the colourful celebrations run three to five days and attract five hundred to a thousand guests, conservative estimate and pushing the cost for the hard hit lower middle class, we are not even talking about the lavish weddings we just saw, we are talking about the lower middle class. The cost of that wedding is from three hundred thousand to one million rupees.

“It has become too expensive; even simple weddings could break the back of poor people like me.” Said Muhammad Aslam who is a sixty two year old retired government employee. Please remember that everyone gets married, not just the rich people; the trend is set by the rich people and everyone has to follow it according to their own standard.

Slides 39- 48:

What do you think this is? It is *jahez*; dowry. Dowry is this huge amount of stuff the girl's family gives to the girl when she gets married and she takes with her to her in-laws' or her husband's house. Let's go through this class and at the end tell me if you think that it's fine or not. Is the

jahez just jewellery and clothes? This picture just broke my heart. Where did the motorbike come from? This picture was from a newspaper; do you see that thing back there, it's probably a fridge. And there's a motorcycle. There's a sewing machine. Imagine somebody living in a not too affluent area in your city like perhaps Korangi or Mahmoodabad; really low middle class; and the poor man is probably a clerk in an office, he's educated and he wants to marry off his daughter. What do you think he has to go through? Can you imagine the amount of money this poor chap and perhaps if the bride has a brother as well, two three members of the family, maybe the mother works as well. How much money do you think they would spend to buy the motorcycle and this paraphernalia? A fridge which costs not less than fifty to sixty thousand; just take a guess, they are in debt for the rest of their lives. That is what dowry is. Where do you draw the line? Look at this one; again a very middle class family dowry and obviously it has to be displayed for people to see, because they need to know what is being given. Then you have lavish dowries as well; look at this, it is probably from a village because they have a tradition of giving a lot of bedding and whatever else they can afford. This is very pretty no doubt; and this is also a dowry, and it has to be displayed for everybody to see.

Slides 49- 53:

This system of weighing a girl's worth by the amount of stuff her parents can give her to get her married off is a totally Hindu system; have you heard of bride burning? Welcome to the real world; this is what happens in Hindu culture. You see we have taken these so called cultural practices from across the border, because we lived with the Hindus for many years. Look at this; Rupees one crore to five crores for a civil servant, fifty lacs to one crore for doctors, five lacs to fifty lacs for others in the list. No dowry for the melt down in Andhra Pradesh, India; and that is exactly what's happening in our country.

It actually happens in Pakistan too; thousands and thousands of girls right here in Karachi are sitting at home, not getting married because their parents can't give them a dowry. Years ago a friend of mine was getting married and her mother gave her just about everything you can think of as dowry; even then her mother in law told her that she hadn't given a car! I am serious. I'm not talking about hearsay; I'm talking about my friend.

This system has been going on for years and has become uglier and uglier. What do you think these lavish weddings are all about? This is the ugly side.

A dowry is given in the Hindus because they feel that a girl herself has no worth. You wouldn't marry a man who thinks like that; well maybe you have the liberty of doing that, but the majority of girls in our country do not have the socio economic backing, the freedom or luxury to choose who they want to marry. We are not saying that the bride should not wear jewellery or pretty clothes; that's fine. The point here is this lavish wedding system. The giving of dowry.

Why don't we look at behind the scenes; who is paying for all this? Even if you can afford it, do you think it's fair on your father or mother? Even if they are making a lot of money, *Alhamdulillah*, and providing you with a luxurious lifestyle, do you think it is fair that they spend half their fortune on getting you married?

I know girls who go abroad to study, go to top universities, who consider themselves emancipated and enlightened and yet they say they want a traditional wedding; and by "traditional wedding" they mean the shebang – *mehndi*, *mayun* and what have you - that is how the system keeps perpetuating.

A lot of families feel or are made to feel, "What will people say if we don't have a "proper" wedding for our child?"

Somebody has to put their foot down somewhere or this will keep continuing because we all are making excuses for it. Why are your parents putting you in an expensive education system, when you can't think for yourself; why would you wear a yellow outfit and sit like a monkey, letting them do what they want with you?

At your age everyone wants to be a rebel – here is a case for you., Go talk about this and tell people about it, ask your friends/family brides, why are you spending fifty thousand rupees on one night's make up?

Often people who are abused as children become abusers themselves as they grow up. That is a very classic syndrome. If you are abused as a child, the likelihood of you becoming an abuser is very high. It's an abusive system and it keeps carrying on if people don't put their foot down.

People who have given *jahez* to their daughters, will feel that they have the right to take it from their daughter-in-laws too. That is the whole point.

Slides 54- 57:

This is a picture of this girl who was burnt in Lahore because she could not bring any *jahez*. Look at it, if you think this is happening only in India, it is happening right here in our country. This girl was twenty two years old when this happened. Sara Liaqat, by the way; this is a newspaper report, I haven't made this up. Sarah is from Lahore and had acid thrown at her over an argument related to arranged marriage; her soon to be sister in law convinced her brother that she was not a suitable wife after they couldn't afford the money to carry out the pre marriage ceremony. And this is not just one Sarah Liaqat, there are so many.

These are the ones who have survived; there are many who don't survive.

What kind of justification do you think you and I will be able to give in front of our Lord on the Day of Judgment, when this is happening to the majority of people where we are living; not just

in the villages, but even in Karachi? How will we stand in front of our Lord and justify a thirty lac rupee or even a one lac rupee *jora*? How could we possibly do that?

Three women die every week in Pakistan from kitchen accidents; this was 2008.

A newspaper in Lahore reported that there are four women per week injured when their stoves allegedly burst killing an average of three of the four women. Bride burning often results because of the disobedience of the wife, the inability of a woman to have a male child or a wife not having a large dowry. Because she didn't bring a large dowry, so get another one; kill her, get another one. This is reality. A lot of times the *jahez* that comes from the *bahu* (daughter in law) is kept for the daughter. It's a ridiculously exploitative system.

This system is being kept alive by educated people, people like us who are influential, who are trendsetters. We have to put our foot down and this dowry and lavish weddings system has to stop. It has an effect all the way down to the lower class.

I consider myself a trendsetter, because Allah (swt) has put me in a position like that; so if I had a simple wedding in my home, my maid will be inspired to do the same, because she wants to be like *baji*; she wants to be like us. If people like us don't change that trend how will it trickle down right to the grass roots because those are the majority of our country.

Don't think for a minute that you and I are not part of this exploitation and cruelty and inhumanity. If we are having lavish weddings in our homes, we are definitely adding fuel to the already blazing fire.

This girl was beaten and sent back home because she didn't bring a dowry; she was asked by her in laws to go home. It doesn't even stop at the time of marriage, it goes on. Have you heard that when the first baby is born, all the expenses are borne by the *nana and nani* (maternal grandparents). Why?

Slides 58- 61:

There are people who sell their kidneys because they want to raise money for their daughter's *jahez*. In a village of Sultanpurmoor, Pakistan, hundreds of people have long side scars for selling their kidneys for as little as seventeen hundred dollars to pay their debts and make dowry payments. This was reported in the Chicago tribune. Seventeen hundred dollars is not a lot of money. It's probably thirty five to forty thousand rupees. They sell their kidneys to marry their daughters off. This is outside a mosque in Islamabad; "Kidney for sale". This man is standing there, saying that he wants to sell his kidney.

Slides 62-64:

There is a huge movement going on in India today against this dowry system, because it is very

deeply entrenched in their social system and although Islam had come to emancipate us Muslim women, we are still in shackles because we want to sing and dance at a *mehndi*!

That is the only reason. People like us don't even think about what the real story behind the picture is; even if it's not happening in your family, because you are having that lavish wedding system, it is carried on from your family down to another family and we cannot stand in front of Allah (swt) and deny the fact that we were a part of this system and did nothing to try to change it.

Slides 65- 66:

You girls will be of marriageable age soon, put your foot down if you are in a situation like that; tell your parents you don't want a lavish weddings, tell your father this is not what he earned all his money for; to blow it up in one night, or pay fifty thousand rupees for one night's make up.

If you can't put your foot down on something and say, "It's my wedding and I'm not going to have it like that." then what's the point of the excellent education? And if there's a guy who you have chosen for yourself and he's just sitting there and saying that it doesn't matter, I'm just watching you get whatever you can get, then don't marry somebody like that. Say you are not going to get married to somebody who will just live off of your father's money. Doesn't he have his own bedroom furniture? If he's so cheap asking your parents for clothes for you or electric appliances from your parents, forget it, he's not worth it.

Sometimes however, it does happen the other way round too; I know somebody who categorically told the girl's family that they don't want any *jahez* but the girl's family thought they were just saying it, so a few days before the wedding a whole truck came with the *jahez* and this boy - the groom - was standing at the gate and he just sent it back; he said we actually meant it, we don't want any of this, take it back. So *Alhamdulillah* that also happens.

The ladies are usually the ones who want all these functions to happen. It's the women who want to wear pretty clothes and have three hour long dance sessions. Let's be honest, it's us who want it.

You must stand up for this cause. Say no to this nonsense. Talk to your friends and family about it and tell people how awful his lavish wedding system is. Go for a simple wedding, sunnah style. Our *deen* makes our lives light and easy. Of course you can have a celebration and wear pretty clothes – just take the extreme expense and unnecessary functions out and you'll see how beautiful and memorable your wedding will be, *inshaallah*. The focus will be on the bride and groom – their emotions and their bonding rather than the wedding outfit and matching decorations, and fancy give-aways and stress over the photo shoot and never ending family squabbles and misunderstandings.

Allah (swt) wants to make things easy for us not difficult.

(Du'a for end of a gathering) *SubhanaRabbikaRabbullzzati 'ammayasifunwasalamun
'alalmursaleen, walhamdulillahiRabbil 'alameen*

(Parting salutation to students) *AssalamalaikumwarahmatullahiwaBarakatuh*