

The Marriage Issue

I have been warned not to write about the subject of marriage. The reason being I've never been married, so the assumption is that I know little or nothing about marriage. I know what it feels like to be literally shouted down when I've tried to express my views on marital issues in the presence of elder men and women. But for the sake of completeness, I will say something. The topic of marriage is one that I have been aware of and consciously contemplated since I was at least fifteen years old. So I have almost fifteen years of theoretical and observatory experience under my belt. Lol. While theory is not everything, it is something.

Before I continue, let me say that many things in life are relative and may be a function of age, culture and perspective, and marriage is not excluded. The idea of marriage takes on different tone at different ages for both men and women. So there are no absolutes here. Younger folks are preoccupied with getting a decent job, keeping fit and getting a fine haircut and hopefully catching the eye of a cute babe/bloke. I have also been reliably informed that my recent preoccupation with sex and sexual matters is a function of my age. They said "this is the time." Apparently, hormones at this stage are naturally in overdrive. (By the way, that means my spiritual game is not at the optimum these days. This is why I wished Jesus had returned forty eight hours after I became born again while I was still chaste and without spot nor wrinkle. But that's an aside). Back to the issue at hand, hormones and all that. Marriage is not the solution. And indeed can't be. What kind of person marries for sex? What happens after the wedding night? What happens when you're tired of doing it, what do you do with the human being you're stuck with for the rest of your life?

As I think about the subject of marriage, I have realized that a lot of heart ache can be prevented by simply marrying the right person for the right reason. Haven't you seen couples with primal mismatch and deep-seated incompatibility issues that make you wonder whose idea was it in the first place? Some people simply shouldn't be together. Trust me, there are wrong people to marry and you will know before you say "I do." There is ALWAYS the proverbial handwriting on the wall. For instance, I have studied the route my life is taking; I like to think I'm ambitious. I will always be at the forefront in life, and will be called to take up responsibilities here and there. And with that comes certain pressures and strains. I cannot marry someone who isn't cut out for such. She must at least have an appreciation of this and be able to deal with it. That's why I can't be too focused on the present and forget the future. The choice of a marriage partner should be made with the progression of life at the back of one's mind. Foresight (the ability to visualize 40, 50 years from now) is very germane in the choice of a partner. Foresight is key – the koko, the main the main.

Then there's the committee of concerned friends and family members who somehow know what is good for you. Some of them are experimental scientists who extrapolate based on the little known information and help you

arrive at your marital conclusions. In the recent past, I have been directly or indirectly introduced to a few ladies and none has worked (sad face). Some of these introductions were mere suggestions, others not so subtle. "I think you should consider so and so, she's a good girl." And then they go on to give you supporting arguments like family background and upbringing. She has always been a good girl. In fact her dad is a pastor. Her father is a politician. And to top it all off, she was also born here in the US. Marry her and your "paper issues" will be resolved once and for all. To be honest, I pursued some of these marital prospects out of regard for the introducer. There are some people you just can't refuse, right? Others I pursued because the introducee had a pretty face. Excuse me, who doesn't like a pretty face? Until I realized that "nkan to wa leyin efa oju eje lo." (Literarily means what is after the number six is more than the number seven). All that glitters is not gold. Others, I knew right away that the possibilities of marital congress were remote, but I delivered my rhymes anyway just to prove a pointless point to myself. Yes, the heart of man is deceitful and desperately wicked like that, who can know it?

For millennials, at least in my experience, there is a lot of reluctance about this whole introduction business. Both of you come to the table trying to figure out who has more to offer. Who has more to gain? Why is a smart and intelligent girl like you finding it difficult to get a man? Why is a handsome guy like you not dating already? Is there a deep dark secret in his/her past which the introducer has deliberately hid from you? Of course, these questions are never verbalized but they sip through attitudes and dispositions. And when both parties somehow conclude that each of them has more to offer, a clash of wills is inevitable.

Now, there's nothing wrong in friends, frenemies and family members introducing you to someone. There have been success stories and I'm sure there will continue to be success stories. In fact, for Africans like myself who find themselves in an environment where the marriage market is kinda limited, the best way to meet new people might be through introductions. But once done, the introducer needs to back off and let the two introducees make their decisions. No one should be trying to goad people into marrying people they do not like or want. How does the fact that you have promised to get someone a husband concern me? People's lives shouldn't be used as fulfillment of an order of favor to someone else, or to curry goodwill. If the man or woman the pastor introduced to you is not the person you want, don't do the pastor a favor with your life. Say NO, thank you! Annoyingly, I have seen this over and over again especially in some of our local Nigerian congregations. Because sister Sandra is going on 30 and pastor thinks she needs to get married, he introduces a jobless brother Richard to her. And because sister Sandra is eager to add a 3-letter prefix and a dot to her name, and can't even imagine rejecting pastor's suggestion, she gives in and marries brother Richard. Of course she would find out on their wedding night that brother Richard is the type that loves to make love in 69 different positions while she is a missionary school graduate. Her marital and sexual fate sealed on a promissory note. I know someone in the USA who's pastor tried to get her to marry a brother in his church back in Nigeria. With no regard for her personal preference and goals. Talk about transatlantic matchmaking.

We can't afford to give the introducer the self-satisfaction of a fruitful introduction by marrying someone we do not want. People like to boast they introduced a couple. "Look at them, don't they look cute together? by the way, I

introduced them.” It’s some sort of emotional trophy. I’m not saying we should become an island in our journey toward marriage. No. I’m just saying we have to be careful and know who we give liberties over our lives. Liberty can be taken for license.

Instead of trying to enforce a bad merger and acquisition, the introducer should let the introducees gather proprietary data. They should go on dates. Going on a date is NOT commitment. Get to know each other. Direct knowledge. A simple conversation over banana bread and coffee at Starbucks can yield great insights. They should watch out for nuances and dispositions. See if they agree on values. If it’s not going to work, why force it to the altar? See if you’re comfortable around each other. If you’re going to live with someone for 40, 50 years, shouldn’t you be able to at least stand the person? Isn’t marriage supposed to be a haven of joy, peace, love and happiness?

Finally, there are those who have told me that marriage is a difficult and painful enterprise. They say it’s a black market. Some people develop philosophies of painful marital experiences as the de facto definition of marriage. But this is not true. I have decided not to buy into this philosophy of marriage. There are loving marriages. And I have decided to make those my model. I have decided to have a happy and loving marriage because no one deserves less. There are too many mediocre things in life, marriage does not have to be one of them.