



The Marriage Union: Sanctity & Fulfillment Qur'an and Psychology

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The Sanctity of the Marriage Union

-Marriage is one of God -The Creator's- signs to Humankind:¹

"And of His signs is that He has created for you, of yourselves, mates so that you would settle beside them in dignified tranquility, and He has rendered between you love (mawaddah) and compassion/mercy (rahmah)....." (Q. 30:21).

-Marriage is one of God -The Provider's- provisions for Humankind:²

"And God has rendered for you, of yourselves, mates, and rendered for you, of your mates, children and grandchildren, and provided for you of the wholesome (sustenance)..." (Q. 16:72).

-Marriage is one of God – The Adjudicator's- 'solemn covenants' (ميثاقا غليظا) with regard to Humankind:³

'And if you (m. pl.) intend to exchange one wife for another and you have given unto one of them a sum however great (a treasure for dower), take not the least of it back, would you take it by slander and manifest wrong? And how could you take it when you have gone in unto each other and they (f. pl.) have taken a solemn covenant from you?'
(Q. 4:20+21).

What is meant by a 'solemn covenant' (ميثاقا غليظا 'meethaqan ghaleetha')?

To understand the original Arabic meaning we must first define the words using a reputable Arabic Lexicon.

¹ وَمِنْ آيَاتِهِ أَنْ خَلَقَ لَكُمْ مِنْ أَنْفُسِكُمْ أَزْوَاجًا لِتَسْكُنُوا إِلَيْهَا وَجَعَلَ بَيْنَكُمْ مَوَدَّةً وَرَحْمَةً إِنَّ فِي ذَلِكَ لَآيَاتٍ لِقَوْمٍ يَتَفَكَّرُونَ (الروم: ٢١)

² وَاللَّهُ جَعَلَ لَكُمْ مِنْ أَنْفُسِكُمْ أَزْوَاجًا وَجَعَلَ لَكُمْ مِنْ أَزْوَاجِكُمْ بَنِينَ وَحَفَدَةً وَرَزَقَكُمْ مِنَ الطَّيِّبَاتِ أَقْبَالِبَاطِلٍ يُؤْمِنُونَ وَبِنِعْمَتِ اللَّهِ هُمْ يَكْفُرُونَ (النحل: ٧٢)

³ وَإِنْ أَرَدْتُمْ اسْتِبْدَالَ زَوْجٍ مَكَانَ زَوْجٍ وَآتَيْتُمْ إِحْدَاهُنَّ قِطْعًا فَلَا تَأْخُذُوا مِنْهُ شَيْئًا اتَّخَذْتُمُوهُنَّ أُمَّهَاتِكُمْ فَإِنَّمَا مَبِينًا (النساء: ٢٠)

- 'Meethaqan/مِيثَاقًا' from the root verb wathaqa/وثق 'tied together,' 'entrusted.'
- 'Ghaleetha/غليظًا' thick, strong, solemn.

'Meethaqan ghaleetha' would most closely be translated as 'solemn covenant,' a grave, momentous agreement between two or more parties.

To understand what is intended, we look to other instances where it appears in the Qur'an. Here we find that, besides being used for the marriage covenant, the term مِيثَاقًا غليظًا refers in the Qur'an to only one other covenant: the Covenant between Prophets (or their followers),ⁱ and God:⁴

'And We took from the prophets their Covenant and from you and from Noah and Abraham and Moses and Jesus son of Mary, and we took from them a Solemn Covenant (7) So that He may question the Truthful concerning the Truth they were charged with.' (Q.33:8)

It seems that this first Solemn Covenant is the 'Truth' that humanity's prophets (and humanity itself) were charged with -and shall be answerable for- and we understand its import and gravity. We also infer that the gravity of this former Solemn Covenant lends itself to the gravity of the latter Solemn Covenant of marriage. But what is the original Solemn Covenant? Many scholars believe it is in the following primordial exchange between the offspring of the children of Adam and their Lord:⁵

"And recount how your Lord brought forth from the Children of Adam, from their loins, their offspring and made them testify regarding themselves: Am I not your Lord? They said, "Yes! We do testify," Lest you say on the Day of Resurrection, "We were unaware of this." Or lest you say, "Our fathers shirked God, and we were descendants after them. Will You then destroy us because of what the falsifiers did?"-
(Q. 7:172).

⁴ وَإِذْ أَخَذْنَا مِنَ النَّبِيِّينَ مِيثَاقَهُمْ وَمِنْكَ وَمِنْ نُوحٍ وَإِبْرَاهِيمَ وَمُوسَىٰ وَعِيسَىٰ ابْنِ مَرْيَمَ وَأَخَذْنَا مِنْهُم مِّيثَاقًا غَلِيظًا ﴿٧﴾ أَلَيْسَ الْصَّادِقِينَ عَنِ صِدْقِهِمْ وَأَعَدَّ لِلْكَافِرِينَ عَذَابًا أَلِيمًا ﴿الاحزاب: ٨﴾

⁵ وَإِذْ أَخَذَ رَبُّكَ مِنْ بَنِي آدَمَ مِنْ ظُهُورِهِمْ ذُرِّيَّتَهُمْ وَأَشْهَدَهُمْ عَلَىٰ أَنفُسِهِمْ أَلَسْتُ بِرَبِّكُمْ قَالُوا بَلَىٰ شَهِدْنَا أَنْ تَقُولُوا يَوْمَ الْقِيَامَةِ إِنَّا كُنَّا عَنْ هَذَا غَافِلِينَ ﴿١٧٢﴾ أَوْ تَقُولُوا إِنَّمَا أَشْرَكَ آبَاؤُنَا مِنْ قَبْلُ وَكُنَّا ذُرِّيَّةً مِّنْ بَعْدِهِمْ أَفَتُهْلِكُنَا بِمَا فَعَلَ الْمُبْطِلُونَ ﴿الأعراف: ١٧٣﴾

This verse seems to refer to a primordial exchange between all offspring of the children of Adam and their Lord; an exchange between human souls and their Divine Source before souls were embodied in their transitory earthly form. At that primordial stage of its existence the human soul acknowledged its Lord Creator and testified to His Uniqueness.

Muslim scholars have postulated that humanity's yearning for spiritual meaning to life is actually the soul's innate quest for its Divine Source. The Human Soul - at a subconscious level- remembers its own primordial testimony to seek and to worship God alone. The above verse refers to that first and foremost 'solemn covenant' undertaken by the human soul as it prepares to embark upon its journey commencing from, gliding away, and returning back to its Creator.

An interesting fact should be mentioned here. Jungian psychology has put forward the theory of the 'collective unconscious' to explain certain inexplicable psychological phenomena shared by humanity, but unrelated to individual knowledge or experience. Jung believed that humans share with each other what has been imprinted upon their psyches from the experience of all their collective ancestors. If we were to take Jung's concept of shared ancestral knowledge all the way back to primordial existence, it might provide one of the best explanations of this verse, to date.

Having established that the Qur'an considers marriage a 'solemn covenant' between husband and wife, we shall now look both to the Qur'an and to modern psychology for the characteristics of a successful marriage. We shall also discuss the function and purpose of the marriage union and, in doing so, uncover the link between the primordial and earthly, gaining a fuller understanding of God's signs.

The Function of Marriage in the Qur'an

The Qur'an says that spouses are 'libaas' or garments for one another:⁶

'Permitted to you the night of the fast to go in unto your wives; they are garments for you and you are garments for them....' (Q. 2:187).

The Qur'an shows us garments at three levels:⁷

'O children of Adam We have bestowed upon you garments to cover your vulnerabilitiesⁱⁱ and as adornmentⁱⁱⁱ but the garment of Awareness (Taqwa) that is best, that is of the signs of God that they may remember.'" (Q. 7:26)

Garments therefore are of three ascending levels:

- Essential garments that protect us from harm by shielding our vulnerabilities.
- Non-essential garments that embellish and adorn us.
- The garment that radiates from our Awareness, 'Taqwa,' referred to as 'that is best, that is of the signs of God.'

Let us now bring together the Qur'anic significance of mates being 'garments' each to the other,

'they are garments for you and you are garments for them..'

The togetherness of mates is a garment that serves to:

- Protect them, each by the other, physically and emotionally;
- Embellish their lives, each by the other, on this earth;
- Create an atmosphere of Awareness that allows them both to grow in Awareness, leading them both to the fulfillment of their physical, psychological and spiritual potential.

The function of marriage therefore, is partners 'garmenting, clothing, or bestowing' upon each other what each requires on every levels, each level providing structure for the next.

⁶ أَجَلَ لَكُمْ لَيْلَةَ الصِّيَامِ الرَّفْتُ إِلَى نِسَائِكُمْ هُنَّ لِبَاسٌ لَكُمْ وَأَنْتُمْ لِبَاسٌ لَهُنَّ عَلِمَ اللَّهُ أَنَّكُمْ كُنْتُمْ تَخْتَانُونَ أَنْفُسَكُمْ فَتَابَ عَلَيْكُمْ وَعَقَا عَنْكُمْ فَالآنَ بَاشِرُوهُنَّ وَابْتَغُوا مِمَّا كَتَبَ اللَّهُ لَكُمْ وَكُلُوا وَاشْرَبُوا حَتَّى يَتَبَيَّنَ لَكُمُ الْخَيْطُ الْأَبْيَضُ مِنَ الْخَيْطِ الْأَسْوَدِ مِنَ الْفَجْرِ ثُمَّ أَتَمُوا الصِّيَامَ إِلَى اللَّيْلِ وَلَا تُبَاشِرُوهُنَّ وَأَنْتُمْ عَاكِفُونَ فِي الْمَسَاجِدِ تِلْكَ حُدُودُ اللَّهِ فَلَا تَقْرِبُوهَا كَذَلِكَ بَيَّنَّ اللَّهُ آيَاتِهِ لِلنَّاسِ لَعَلَّهُمْ يَتَّقُونَ (البقرة: ١٨٧)

⁷ يَا بَنِي آدَمَ قَدْ أَنْزَلْنَا عَلَيْكُمْ لِبَاسًا يُؤَارِي سُوَاتِكُمْ وَرِيشًا وَلِبَاسُ التَّقْوَى ذَلِكَ خَيْرٌ ذَلِكَ مِنْ آيَاتِ اللَّهِ لَعَلَّهُمْ يَذَكَّرُونَ (الأعراف: ٢٦)

The final level, the spiritual outcome of their togetherness, guides them towards the essence of their existence as they grow together, fulfilling their God-given potential in this life towards the next. This seems to explain why marriage is considered so sacred a 'covenant,' one that holds a person of faith to greatest accountability.

However, growth always requires the right conditions, and in order to properly 'garment' each other, spouses should be residing in dignified tranquility 'sakeenah,' exchanging love 'mawaddah,' and compassion 'raHmah:'

"And of His signs is that He has created for you, of yourselves, mates so that you would settle beside them in dignified tranquility, and He has rendered between you love (mawaddah) and compassion/mercy (raHmah)....." (Q. 30:21).

Tranquility, love and compassion are not simply outcomes of a successful marriage union. Love 'mawaddah'⁸ and compassion 'raHmah' are the two major components that lead to tranquility 'sakeenah,' and they shall be discussed in detail later. Tranquility 'sakeenah,' on the other hand, is the purpose of marriage. We shall see how the function of marriage -garmenting- and the purpose of marriage -tranquility- come together in the Qur'an.

The Purpose of Marriage in the Qur'an

The Qur'an tells us that the purpose of marriage is so that ('li') each of us would settle in tranquility and find serenity and a feeling of 'home' at the side of our mate. 'Sakeenah' is tranquility, calmness, being at ease in a dignified relationship.⁹

⁸ 'Mawaddah' is the type of love that is not only about the present; it is about anticipating the future.
ابن فارس: وَدَّ: كَلِمَةٌ تُدَلُّ عَلَى مَحَبَّةٍ وَدِدْتُهُ: أَحْبَبْتُهُ. وَوَدِدْتُ أَنْ ذَلِكَ كَانَ، إِذَا تَمَنَّيْتَهُ، أَوْ دُ فِيهِمَا جَمِيعًا. وَفِي الْمَحَبَّةِ الْوُدُّ، وَفِي التَّمَنِّيِ الْوَدَادَةُ.

⁹ Lexicographer Ibn Faris, deceased 1004:

-Similar context with 'li'= so that:¹⁰

“It is He who created you from a single soul (nafs) and created from it its mate so that it could settle in tranquility by its side....” (Q. 7:189)

'Sakeenah' is the feeling of tranquility, comfort, contentment, and satisfaction one can get from snuggling to one's mate: physically, mentally, emotionally, spiritually.

Having discussed the Qur'anic significance of libaas -garmenting- as function of marriage, what is the Qur'anic significance of sakeenah -dignified tranquility- as reason for marriage? In other words, if spouses are like protective garments that deliver each other to a state of awareness, providing each other with 'sakan' or 'sakeenah,' what is the purpose of the 'sakeenah' itself?

The first step in understanding the Qur'an is to seek explanation within the Qur'an itself.

Is 'sakeenah' mentioned elsewhere in the Qur'an, and in what context?

Such research reveals a surprise.

Besides one's mate, there seems to be another bequest created specifically to provide humans with 'tranquility' sakeenah. Furthermore, this bequest is also considered a 'garment!'¹¹

“And it is He who made the night as a robe (garment 'libaasan') for you, and sleep as repose...” (Q. 25:47).

“Root-verb 'sakana' is the opposite of agitation and movement. Something 'sakan' is calm and tranquil, so it is 'saakin.' 'Sakan' is the family residing tranquilly at home. 'Sakan' also is someone you love and settle with. And from that word comes 'sakeenah' which is serene dignity.”

سَكَنَ: يَذُلُّ عَلَى خِلَافِ الْإِضْطِرَابِ وَالْحَرَكَةِ. يُقَالُ سَكَنَ الشَّيْءُ يَسْكُنُ سَكُونًا فَهُوَ سَاكِنٌ. وَالسَّكَنُ: الْأَهْلُ الَّذِينَ يَسْكُنُونَ الدَّارَ. وَالسَّكَنُ: كُلُّ مَا سَكَنَتْ إِلَيْهِ مِنْ مَحْبُوبٍ. وَمِنْ الْبَابِ السَّكِينَةُ، وَهُوَ الْوَقَارُ

¹⁰ هُوَ الَّذِي خَلَقَكُمْ مِنْ نَفْسٍ وَاحِدَةٍ وَجَعَلَ مِنْهَا زَوْجَهَا لِيَسْكُنَ إِلَيْهَا فَلَمَّا تَغَشَّاهَا حَمَلَتْ حَمْلًا خَفِيًّا فَمَرَّتْ بِهِ فَلَمَّا أَثْقَلَتْ دَعَا اللَّهَ رَبُّهَا لَنْ أَاتِيَنَّهَا صَالِحًا لَنْكَوْنَنَّ مِنَ الشَّاكِرِينَ (الأعراف: ١٨٩)

¹¹ وَهُوَ الَّذِي جَعَلَ لَكُمْ اللَّيْلَ لِبَاسًا وَالنَّوْمَ سُبَاتًا وَجَعَلَ النَّهَارَ نُشُورًا (الفرقان: ٤٧)

وَجَعَلْنَا اللَّيْلَ لِبَاسًا (١٠) وَجَعَلْنَا النَّهَارَ مَعَاشًا (النبا: ١١) هُوَ الَّذِي جَعَلَ لَكُمْ اللَّيْلَ لِتَسْكُنُوا فِيهِ وَالنَّهَارَ مُبْصِرًا إِنَّ فِي ذَلِكَ لَآيَاتٍ لِقَوْمٍ يُسْمِعُونَ (يونس: ٦٧)

“And We made the night as a garment (10) and We made the day as means of subsistence.” (Q. 78:11).

“It is He who made the night for you to settle- rest-find serenity within it (‘li-taskunu feeh’.....)” (Q. 10:67).

This correlation between marriage and nighttime is quite significant:

Spouses and nighttime are called ‘libaas.’

Spouses and nighttime are ‘sakan’ or ‘sakeenah.’

We shall attempt, by examining the purpose of ‘sakeenah’ with regard to nighttime, to reveal the purpose of ‘sakeenah’ with regard to marriage.

“It is He who appointed the night and day in succession for whomever has the will to reflect (by night) and whomever has the will to appreciate (actively, by day).¹²
Qur’an: (25:62).

Nighttime then is for reflection, remembrance ‘tathakkur,’ a spiritual exercise that can only be accomplished in a state of ‘sakeenah’ or tranquility. Tranquility therefore is necessary for spiritual enhancement. Moreover, the Qur’an shows us how tranquility augments and strengthens faith (and trust), ‘Emaan:’¹³

‘It is He who sent down dignified tranquility ‘sakeenah’ into the hearts of the Faithful so that they may increase in Faith added to their own Faith, for to God belong the agents of the Exalted Expanses and the Earth, and God is the All-Knowing, the All-Wise.” (Q. 48:04)

The purpose of ‘sakeenah’ then is to provide an atmosphere of reflection for the growth and development of Faith. Faith, for which God created nighttime for us to replenish our physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual strength for the coming day. Faith, for which God created mates for us to be united with, in His name, towards that very goal.

The journey to faith is, therefore, what our primordial solemn covenant with God and the solemn covenant of marriage have in common.

¹² وَهُوَ الَّذِي جَعَلَ اللَّيْلَ وَالنَّهَارَ خِلْفَةً لِمَنْ أَرَادَ أَنْ يَذَّكَّرَ أَوْ أَرَادَ شُكُورًا {الفرقان: ٦٢}

¹³ هُوَ الَّذِي أَنْزَلَ السَّكِينَةَ فِي قُلُوبِ الْمُؤْمِنِينَ لِيَزْدَادُوا إِيمَانًا مَعَ إِيْمَانِهِمْ وَبِاللَّهِ جُنُودَ السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ وَكَانَ اللَّهُ عَلِيمًا حَكِيمًا {الفتح: ٤}

The first was a pledge to undertake that journey.

The second is the ideal set of resources towards the accomplishment of the journey.

Characteristics Of a Successful Marriage: Psychological & Qur'anic studies

Studies in Psychology evaluate the success of a couple's relationship by way of Sternberg's 'Love Triangle' which consists of three components, commitment, intimacy and passion. Modern psychology defines and explains the depths of each component, depths referred to in the Qur'an more than 14 centuries ago.

1. Sternberg considers the first component of the love triangle 'Commitment,' which is the basis for all subsequent interaction. Religious institutions view this Commitment as sacred. The Qur'an calls the pledge of spousal commitment a 'Solemn Covenant' (meethaqan ghaleetha).

2. Sternberg calls the second component of the love triangle 'Intimacy,' and defines it as the couple's sense of being bonded to one another, or at the very least, in agreement, as they share all aspects of their lives together; the physical, emotional, mental, social and recreational.

This component is mentioned in the second part of the following verse:

"And of His signs is that He has created for you, of yourselves, mates so that you would settle beside them in tranquility, and He has rendered between you love (mawaddah) and compassion/mercy (raHmah)....." (Q. 30:21).

'Mawaddah,' from the root verb 'wadda' is the type of love that is present and looks forward to the future.

The Qur'an tells us that Prophet Muhammad and the other Prophets (peace upon them) always told their people "I ask of you no personal reward-compensation." However, there was one thing God had told Prophet Muhammad to ask Quraish, his own tribe, for:¹⁴

"..... say no reward for this do I ask of you, except the love/mawaddah in kinship ... (Q. 42:23).

This 'mawaddah,' or love-bond of agreement as partners share life together and look to the future, is carried beyond the parents themselves to the extended family. That past, present, and forward-looking bond of love between kin is what the Prophet was asking Qureish for. And that love-bond is a major component in a successful marriage, mentioned in the Qur'an as 'mawaddah' and labeled 'Intimacy' in psychological studies.

3. Sternberg calls the third component of the couple's love triangle 'Passion,' defining it as a state of intense longing for reciprocated love, resulting in a sense of fulfillment and ecstasy. Interestingly, elaborating on that definition, passion is said to be manifested by making love, or by touching, kissing, or even by gazing. Although passion between couples is often manifested by sexual intercourse, Psychology does not consider that manifestation the most important. *Psychology states that the most important manifestation of passion is Nurturance, each mate of the other, as each helps the other achieve self-actualization, or fulfillment of one's full potential.*

Doesn't Psychology's interpretation of the bond between couples as a manifestation of intimacy, with nurturance as the most important manifestation of passion, seem to reinforce the function of marriage as understood from the Qur'an? What better reinforcement is there than 'garmenting' or bestowing each spouse upon the other what he/she requires at the physical, psychological and spiritual levels of existence in order to fulfill their potential? Marriage in the

¹⁴ ذَلِكَ الَّذِي يُبَشِّرُ اللَّهَ عِبَادَهُ الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا وَعَمِلُوا الصَّالِحَاتِ قُلْ لَا أَسْأَلُكُمْ عَلَيْهِ أَجْرًا إِلَّا الْمَوَدَّةَ فِي الْقُرْبَىٰ وَمَن يَقْتَرِفْ حَسَنَةً نَّزِدْ لَهُ فِيهَا حُسْنًا إِنَّ اللَّهَ غَفُورٌ شَكُورٌ (الشورى: ٢٣)

Qur'an is intended to be a springboard towards self-fulfillment on all physical, spiritual and social levels.

Isn't the fulfillment of potential at each stage in our lives the dream of each and every one of us?

Yet so few of us find -or help create- the right circumstances to evolve, and so many of us remain unfulfilled. It is quite sad to note that many who have failed to evolve and have never realized their potential owe that deficiency to restrictive personal or religious misconceptions.

In Sternberg's 'Love Triangle,' the second component Intimacy and the love-bond, called 'mawaddah' in the Qur'an, is joined by the third component, Passion/Nurturance, which the Qur'an calls 'raHmah:'

"...and He has rendered between you (love) mawaddah and (compassion) raHmah."

RaHmah, from the root-verb 'raHama:' having compassion, mercy.

Expressions of 'raHmah' compassion/mercy:

A) About Prophet Muhammad: ﷺ

"We have not sent you but as a mercy to the Worlds" (Q. 21:107).¹⁵

B) About his relationship with his companions:

"It is by God's mercy/compassion that you were lenient towards them, for had you been stern and harsh-hearted^{iv} they would have broken away from you, so pardon them and ask forgiveness for them and consult them in the matter, then when you have made your decision, put your trust in God, for God loves those who put their trust in him." (Q. 3:159)

¹⁵ وَمَا أَرْسَلْنَاكَ إِلَّا رَحْمَةً لِّلْعَالَمِينَ (الأنبياء: ١٠٧)

By God's 'raHmah' compassion/mercy, His Messenger was lenient towards his people. Gentle-mannered and gentle-hearted, pardoning them, asking God to forgive them, and consulting them in matters.

C) Within our families:

1. Towards our young children we express unconditional compassion as we nurture them into this life:

As narrated by Bukhari, a Bedouin came to the Prophet ﷺ and asked him: You kiss your sons? We do not kiss them! To which the Prophet replied: "Can I help it if God has withdrawn compassion 'raHmah' from your heart?"

2. Towards our elderly parents we express unconditional compassion as we nurture them out of this life:¹⁶

"..... should either of your parents or both of them attain old age with you, say not to them the slightest utterance of contempt nor repel them but speak to them graciously. And lower to them compassion's wing of humility and say: My Lord have mercy on them both just as they raised me in childhood." (Qur'an: 17:23).

It seems compassion has many a 'wing' or side to it, one of which God commends and indeed specifically demands of adult children towards their elderly parents, and that is deferential humility (thull).¹⁷

The Prophet called kissing a manifestation of 'raHmah,' and the Qur'an called nurturance a manifestation of 'raHmah,' emphasizing that amongst God's signs was the 'raHmah' instilled between husband and wife. Fifteen centuries later Sternberg speaks of nurturance, the most important aspect to passion, which requires more sustained effort and patience than all the others. That is because

¹⁶ وَقَضَىٰ رَبُّكَ أَلَّا تَعْبُدُوا إِلَّا إِيَّاهُ وَبِالْوَالِدَيْنِ إِحْسَانًا إِمَّا يَبُلُغَنَّ عِنْدَكَ الْكِبَرَ أَحَدُهُمَا أَوْ كِلَاهُمَا فَلَا تَقُلْ لَهُمَا قَوْلًا كَرِيمًا (الإسراء: ٢٣)

¹⁷ 'Thull' or deferential humility where one is humbled -even to the degree of humiliation- is never a positive trait in the Qur'an *except in this single scenario* of how an adult child must behave towards elderly parents!

nurturance, the third component of the love triangle, is to be maintained throughout every facet of a couple's life, especially as the pair bid farewell to grown-up children and begin to age together.

Incidentally, psychology also tells us that when a component is lacking there is no success as a couple. To elaborate:

Passion alone is called 'infatuation' and does not last.

'Romantic love' is where there is intimacy and passion, but no commitment. That too does not last. 'Companionate love' is where there is commitment and intimacy, but no passion (nurturance). That union could last, but it neither enhances the couple nor helps each evolve to self-actualization; partners who are not nurtured cannot achieve their potential as individuals or as a couple. A successful union is where there is 'complete' or 'consummate love,' holding all three components, commitment, intimacy and passion.

The Qur'an speaks of all three, highlighting:

1. In commitment, the solemn covenant ('meethaqan ghaleetha').
2. In intimacy, the love-bond ('mawaddah').
3. In passion, nurturance ('raHmah').

The Qur'an also gives us the protective 'libaas' of awareness as the function of marriage, 'sakeenah' dignified tranquility as the reason for marriage, everything coming together to support the successful couple on their life-journey of spiritual growth that leads to their everlasting gratification. Yet it is a fact that not everyone gets married and not all spouses are compatible. Unmarried persons could attain social and spiritual self-fulfillment (despite lacking sensual fulfillment), usually within a like-minded community. Actually, they might find it easier to achieve fulfillment than those who are tied down by incompatible spouses. This may be the main reason why divorce is allowed in Islam: to allow hindered persons to evolve freely.

Conclusion:

“And of His signs is that He has created for you, of yourselves, mates so that you would settle beside them in tranquility, and He has rendered between you love (mawaddah) and compassion/mercy (raHmah).....” (Q. 30:21).

When marriage is considered and conducted correctly, each mate would give equally unto the other, each mate generating tranquility, love and compassion. There is no wing of humility here, but rather a partnership on wings of mutual nurturance since both spouses need to flourish and realize their potential as individuals and as a couple.

A successful marriage is one of life’s most important accomplishments. Our Prophet ﷺ considered those who got married to have acquired half of what they are accountable for, telling them to be aware of God with respect to the remaining half.¹⁸ Our Lord, the Enhancer, the All-Knowing, has made marriage, with its three provisions of tranquility, love and compassion a sacred bond that sets each of us upon the route of success in this life and the next.

Together, successful couples create the solid base from which to embark upon life’s daily ventures, gaining knowledge, working, earning livelihoods, raising children to carry on after them, dealing with and overcoming trouble and tribulation, becoming grandparents as they see their own parents off ... all the while gaining spiritual strength and wisdom until it is their turn to depart without regret.

That is the function and purpose of marriage, and reason for its sanctity. It is therefore most worthy of people of faith to cherish and appreciate the Marriage Union, one of God The Creator’s great signs, one of God The Provider’s great gifts, one of God The Adjudicator’s ‘solemn covenants’ with regard to Humanity.

فليبارك الله

¹⁸ عن أنس بن مالك -رضي الله عنه- أن النبي -صلى الله عليه وسلم- قال: (إِذَا تَزَوَّجَ الْعَبْدُ فَقَدْ اسْتَكْمَلَ نِصْفَ الدِّينِ، فَلْيَتَّقِ اللَّهَ فِي الْبَاقِي). ذكره البيهقي، “حسن”

Randa Hamwi, for M. H. & M. A. A.
Speech delivered at their Marriage Ceremony on Friday, May 23rd 2003.

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i “And we raised the mount above them in (attesting) their Covenant and we said to them, “ Enter the gate prostrate,” and we told them, “ Do not transgres the Sabbath,” and we took from them a Solemn Covenant.” (Q. 4:154)
وَرَفَعْنَا فَوْقَهُمُ الطُّورَ بِمِيثَاقِهِمْ وَقُلْنَا لَهُمْ ادْخُلُوا الْبَابَ سُجَّدًا وَقُلْنَا لَهُمْ لَا تَعْدُوا فِي السَّبْتِ وَأَخَذْنَا مِنْهُمْ مِيثَاقًا غَلِيظًا (النساء: ١٥٤)

ii ‘Saw’ah/ سوءة that which could impair (in any way; physical, spiritual, etc.)

iii ‘Reesh’ luxury, also feathers. Origin of the word ‘rich.’

iv Also ‘rigid-minded.’ ‘Qalb’ in the Qur’an is the seat of comprehension and refers to the heart-mind, as in the verse which says ‘....who have hearts-minds by which they comprehend not and have eyes by which they see not and have ears by which they hear not, such are alike to cattle or even further astray, such are the heedless.’ (Q.7:178)
وَلَقَدْ ذَرَأْنَا لِجَهَنَّمَ كَثِيرًا مِّنَ الْجِنِّ وَالإِنسِ لَهُمْ قُلُوبٌ لَّا يَفْقَهُونَ بِهَا وَلَهُمْ أَعْيُنٌ لَّا يُبْصِرُونَ بِهَا وَلَهُمْ آذَانٌ لَّا يَسْمَعُونَ بِهَا أُولَئِكَ كَالْإِطْعَامِ بَلْ هُمْ أَضَلُّ أُولَئِكَ هُمُ الْغَافِلُونَ (الأعراف: ١٧٩)