

Fast 14: Women in Islam — 7: Husband and wife

- According to the Quran, the relationship between husband and wife is a very close, intimate and loving one. It tells us that relationships through marriage are like blood relationships:

“And He it is Who has created man from water, then He has made for him blood-relationship and marriage-relationship. And your Lord is ever Powerful.” (25:54)

وَهُوَ الَّذِي خَلَقَ مِنَ الْمَاءِ بَشَرًا فَجَعَلَهُ نَسَبًا
وَصِهْرًا ۗ وَكَانَ رَبُّكَ قَدِيرًا ﴿٥٤﴾

Relationships established through marriage are as much a part of the system of nature as relationships established through one's birth, even though the former is established by people by their own decision and the latter are not in a person's control. Another interpretation is that “blood-relationship” here (*nasab*) means your descent through the male line, or your relations on your father's side, and that “marriage-relationship” (*sihr*) means your relations on your mother's side. A person is as much descended from his mother as from his father, though in different ways.

- The first of the verses recited at the Muslim marriage ceremony begins as follows:

“O people, keep your duty to your Lord, Who created you from a single being (*nafs*) and created its mate of the same (kind) and spread from these two many men and women.” (4:1)

يَا أَيُّهَا النَّاسُ اتَّقُوا رَبَّ الَّذِي خَلَقَكُمْ
مِنْ نَفْسٍ وَاحِدَةٍ وَخَلَقَ مِنْهَا زَوْجَهَا وَ
بَثَّ مِنْهُمَا رِجَالًا كَثِيرًا وَنِسَاءً

The word *nafs* means ‘soul’ as well as ‘kind’, ‘essence’ or ‘being’. Therefore, man and woman are one in essence and spirit, and marriage is their union. It is often thought that this verse refers to Adam and Eve, and the single or one *nafs* is Adam, and the mate Eve was created from him. But it is stated in another verse:

“And Allah has made wives for you **from among yourselves**, and has given you sons and daughters from your wives, and has provided you with good things. Will they then believe in falsehood and deny the favour of Allah?” (16:72)

وَاللَّهُ جَعَلَ لَكُمْ مِنْ أَنْفُسِكُمْ أَزْوَاجًا
وَجَعَلَ لَكُمْ مِنْ أَزْوَاجِكُمْ بَنِينَ وَحَفَدَاتٍ
وَرَزَقَكُمْ مِنَ الطَّيِّبَاتِ أَفَبِالْبَاطِلِ
يُؤْمِنُونَ وَبِعَنَتِ اللَّهِ هُمْ يَكْفُرُونَ ﴿٧٢﴾

In the words “yourselves” (*anfusi kum*), the plural of *nafs* is used (*anfus*). Obviously, “from among yourselves” cannot mean that a man’s wife is created from him in the way that, according to legend and according to the Bible, Eve was created from Adam. It means that the wife is of the same essence as her husband. Here the importance of wives is recognized as the ones by whom God gives you sons and daughters, which are among the good things provided by God. The word translated here as “daughters” (*hafadah*) is taken by most translators of the Quran as meaning grandsons, but it also means ‘daughters’ and that meaning is more suitable here.

- A similar verse to the above is the following:

“And of His (God’s) signs is this, that He created mates for you from yourselves, that you may find **quiet of mind in them**, and He put between you **love and compassion**.” (30:21)

وَمِنْ آيَاتِهِ أَنْ خَلَقَ لَكُمْ مِنْ أَنْفُسِكُمْ
 أَزْوَاجًا لِتَسْكُنُوا إِلَيْهَا وَجَعَلَ بَيْنَكُمْ
 مَوَدَّةً وَرَحْمَةً إِنَّ فِي ذَلِكَ لَآيَاتٍ لِقَوْمٍ
 يَتَفَكَّرُونَ ﴿٢١﴾

Again, because the “mates” are “from yourselves” (*min anfusi kum*), you find fulfilment and quiet of mind in them, and there is naturally love and compassion between you two. This verse occurs in a section in which several signs of the existence of God, and His power and mercy, are mentioned (30:20–25); for example, the next verse mentions the sign of “the creation of the heavens and the earth and the diversity of your tongues and colours” (30:22). Therefore, the love and compassion between husband and wife is as fundamental a sign as creation itself.

- Another such verse is as follows:

“He it is Who created you from a single being (*nafs*) and of the same did He make his mate that he might **find comfort** in her.” (7:189)

هُوَ الَّذِي خَلَقَكُمْ مِنْ نَفْسٍ وَاحِدَةٍ وَجَعَلَ
 مِنْهَا زَوْجَهَا لِيَسْكُنَ إِلَيْهَا

The word translated as “comfort” is the same as “quiet of mind” in the previous verse, and is based on the word *sukūn* (well-known to Urdu speakers as well).

- As pointed out in an earlier Study (Fast 8), it is in a verse in the section on Fasting that the following words occur about husbands and wives:

“They are an apparel (i.e., attire or clothing) for you and you are an apparel for them.” (2:187)

هُنَّ لِبَاسٌ لَكُمْ وَأَنْتُمْ لِبَاسٌ لَهُنَّ

This indicates the utmost closeness. There is nothing between a person and what he or she is wearing. A person's clothes are in the closest possible contact with him or her. They cover the person, protect his body and adorn it. The expression used in the Quran is reciprocal and mutual: the female is an apparel for the male, and vice versa.

Here is an analogy. In electrical equipment, you need a plug and a socket. They are different but equally important. Both are needed for the current to flow. Each needs the other for completion (of the circuit).