Topical Interpretation of the Holy Qur'an

Zan-Mard / Woman-Man
Spousal Relationship



Mohammad Ali Ansari

Translated from Farsi by
Ali Asghar Agah

Edited by
Mariam Agah

All glory to Him who created pairs of everything...; the Glorified Allah has instilled the inherent pairing principle in a general form in creation, *...that grows from the earth, and out of themselves, and other things they do not know (Q36:36).* It is in plants. It is in animals. And the highest form of pairing is seen among human beings.

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Among His signs is that He created for you from yourselves spouses that you may dwell in tranquility with them, and instilled love and compassion between you. Verily there are signs in this for those who reflect.

The Holy Qur'an, Surah Al-Rum, Verse 21

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Spousal Relationship

Last Session of a Six-Part Lecture Series

by
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In the Name of Allah, the Beneficent, the Merciful

Translator's Notes:

This is a free translation of the sixth (last) part of *Topical Interpretation of the Holy Qur'an*, Farsi lecture series by Dr. Mohammad Ali Ansari on *Zan/Mard [Woman/Man]*, delivered in Spring 2006 at Ferdowsi University of Mashhad, Iran. Transcribed from the CD of the same name published by Cultural Institute of Bayaan-e Hedayat-e Nour.

- For the sake of conciseness, comprehension and other linguistic considerations, not every word, phrase or sentence has been translated if it is not essential and if its deletion does not interrupt the meaning and the flow of thought. For example, at the end of this part, the speaker answers some questions related to previous parts of this series, and since they were not related to this part, they were not translated.
- [...] is translator's.
- Arabic, Farsi and other non-English words are simply spelled phonetically, not using any established rules.
- *Italics* are used for Qur'anic Aayaat [verses], words, poems, expressions, proverbs, and so forth.
- *The Holy Qur'an*, an English translation by Aqa Mirza Mahdi Puya and S.V. Mir Ahmad Ali is used for Qur'anic citations.
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I take refuge with Allah from the rejected Satan

In the Name of Allah, the Beneficent, the Merciful

Nothing moves, except by the power of Allah, the High, the Great

O Allah bless our master Muhammad and his good, purified household, the guides for the guided

It is a blessing to be in the presence of and address the respected attendees of the last part of the collection of a look at the Aayaat [verses] about woman/man in the Holy Qur'an.

In the previous session, based on the Aayaat of the Qur'an, we considered the relations between woman and man on three levels; and in the third part of these relations, we mentioned that their human and belief aspects have physical and gender characteristics. And that in these kinds of relations two different ways can be seen. One way is *[saa'a sabeelaa/an evil way] (Qur'an/Q4:22*), but not the right and correct way. It is a way that is crooked. There is another way that is in the context of existence and divine creation. The sincerest, closest kind of relationship between these two beings will be of this kind.

We said that in the Holy Qur'an, Allah (*sobhaanahou wa t'aalaa/the Glorified and Exalted/swt*) draws a "void" line on the relationship that is not [divinely] prescribed, and will not be accepted by people of intellect. The Qur'an forbids it with jarring phrases and expressions that require attention. At the end of previous parts, we also talked about complications resulting from those kinds of relationships that we will not repeat here; and now we present the next part.

Before talking about some important Aayaat in the Qur'an related to this subject, Allah (swt) considers the relations

between woman and man in the Qur'an with the expression *"zawjiyyat [pairing, coupling, close union (of two things), doubling, germinating, join in a pair, unite in matrimony, marriage, wedding, spousal union of a man and a woman],"* indicating that the concept of union of two things, germination and spousal principle is a reality that moves and floats in the context of existence and creation.

All glory to Him who created pairs of everything...; the Glorified Allah has instilled the inherent pairing principle in a general form in creation, *...that grows from the earth, and out of themselves, and other things they do not know (Q36:36).* It is in plants. It is in animals. And the highest form of pairing is seen among human beings.

In fact, when we look at the word *zawjiyyat*, the word *zawj* [one of a pair] in the Arabic lexicon, and indeed in the Qur'an, has two hidden aspects in it. One point that is hidden in the meaning of the word zawj is the meaning of conjunction, symmetry and similarity. Basically, wherever the word *zawj* is used, it relates to this meaning, sameness and likeness.

The second meaning of *zawj* and its derivative that we have is the meaning of completion and perfection. It seems wherever this word is used, somehow the meaning of completion and perfection come to mind. Whenever and wherever *zawj* is not realized, there is a feeling of shortcoming; therefore, the word *zawj* is not used.

Given the meanings that we see in this word itself in the collective teachings of the Qur'an and Islam, we get the feeling that Allah (swt) has granted an extraordinary characteristic to human beings; appearing that human beings have a great share among the creatures, indicating: *and create you in pairs? (Q78:8).* That Allah (swt) has instilled

in the creation and existence of us human beings this important characteristic.

One aspect of pairing that human beings feel is the need for wanting physical pairing that continues on its own course. Along with this, an important part is seen and that is the main and basic psychological need of the spirit of human beings for this important phenomenon [coupling]. In literary terms, I offer that perhaps the spirit of the human being is designed in such a way that in the creation, in this temporary home of Earth, and in this long course ahead, the human spirit is concerned with and afraid of being alone. S/he likes to find a companion, a confidant, a cohabitant and a co-traveler to be able to go through this difficult journey; on the course of this journey, share and divide sincerely and heartily, the bitterness, sweetness, togetherness, separation, oneness and fears in some way in order to go through this course easily.

We can see precisely this understanding of the subject of marriage among some of the Qur'anic verses and the narratives of the religious leaders. I apologize for presenting some aspects of this subject more openly, as I believe that in discussing such subjects we are somewhat entangled with self censorship; meaning that we observe some aspects of modesty and sanctity more than their limit and place ourselves in their confines, preventing us from explaining certain matters which have been discussed more openly in the religious texts, yet we are afraid to talk more openly about them. In any case, we feel that the sexual dimension is the animal aspect of spousal relations. Because we know that among the instincts of us human beings, our most animalistic instinct is the sexual instinct, our sexual lust. When we look at the sequence of eating, sleeping, anger and lust, the rest of the instincts, such as eating and sleeping are at the service of lust, and the peak of animalistic ability of human beings is seen in sexual instinct.

But in the divine order of spousal partnership and the design that the Qur'an has, and that divine religions generally have, this sexual relationship is interrelated and coupled with that spiritual association, in which the color of this relationship is changed; it becomes of another kind. A halo of a special kind and color envelopes the sphere of this type of relationship, too; and spousal law, in general, will include and present both [sexual and spiritual] dimensions in an exalted form.

Hence, we see that in Islamic teachings, the principle of marriage itself and the said dimensions are not only a human, social, economic necessity that is considered anyway as the main step in establishing a societal unit; rather, it is considered as an act of worship, a beloved and desirable act of supplication, meaning that this relationship finds a sacred color and holy fragrance [to the point that] as has been stated, *"No building is raised to being loved by the Glorified Almighty as much as the edifice of marriage."* This is the highest citadel, most loved before Allah (swt). We see such expression of encouraging marriage in the Qur'an itself and in the narrative texts, whether telling human beings themselves to marry (Q4:3), or to facilitate the marriage of others (Q24:32). That is if you yourself need to, get married; if your need is met, think of others, and spread this culture in the society.

Well, we see the merits attributed to marriage and all the famous narrations that you ladies and gentlemen have heard and know that whoever marries fulfills half, or two-thirds, or all of her/his religious duties. Thus the principle of marriage is basically presented as a blessed act of worship. And when such marriage is formed, its continuity and survival are viewed in the same way. That is, when you see the affection and love between wife and husband, as their belief increases

so does the love toward their spouse. To love one's wife and to love one's husband is considered as one of the most distinct signs of belief in our traditions. This is indeed, a very important point to think about and contemplate. We see that fulfilling the spousal needs is addressed as blissful acts of worship in this religion and its laws. That is, the one who strives to provide essentials and secure the necessities of spousal and family life is considered a self-sacrificing partner in struggle.

And again we see that disconnecting and breaking this covenant is not welcomed:

Said the Prophet, not to step into separation,
[For] the worst thing to me is divorce.

Thus, we see that washing one's hands of the spousal relationship is neither prescribed, nor recommended, and it is even interdicted. Well, these are characteristics that we see in the collective aspects of spousal relations. Given the above introductory points, let us study a few of the Qur'anic verses, which can be considered as the leading principles [of spousal relations], and in the meantime raise certain questions, which can be answered by displaying the facts of this matter; thereby, God willing, the final summary of this series of lectures is presented.

Aayah/Verse 21 of Surah *Ar-Rum*/30, which was recited by the respected reciter before I began speaking, is one of the most important verses of the Holy Qur'an. Allah (swt) has explicitly revealed this verse in Surah *Ar-Rum* along with other verses of His signs on which the systems in nature depend. Coming and going of day and night. Appearance of the sun and the moon. All important natural evolutions in existence point to this verse: *"Among His signs is that He created for you from yourselves spouses ...."* This is one of

the Divine signs. However, three other [complementary] points follow right after the first phrase of verse 21. My understanding is that Allah (swt) is relating that spousal relations find their meaning through these three points, indicating that there are three principles, three bases of these three points, and that if these three points are not there, the spousal relationship and marriage will not be actualized.

To begin with, Allah (swt) indicates: *"... that you may dwell in tranquility with them..."*. That is, when the covenant of marriage is formed, Allah (swt) instills this relationship in the body and spirit of woman and man in order to *"dwell in tranquility"* with one another. The letter "*laam*" in the word "*letaskonoo*," is called the *"laam-e ghaayat,"* the "*laam*" of the ultimate necessary result.

The first point that is made is *"taskeen/tranquility."* The word *"letaskonoo/that you many dwell in tranquility"* is derived from "*taskeen*" and "*sokoonat*." To be accurate, the word "*sokoonat*" should not be used because ethically it is not right, because the term "*sokoonat*" relates to disgrace and abjectness. But the word "*soknaa*" relates to the correct meaning. The "*soknaa*" and "*taskeen*" that Allah (swt) relates to here can be said in other words to be the meaning of the term *"sakeenah/tranquility,"* the station [and high meaning] of which can be found in some verses of the Holy Qur'an. For example, *"He [Allah (swt)] it is who sent down tranquility into the hearts of the believers"* (Q48:4), indicating that this *"letaskonoo/that you may dwell in tranquility"* is a connecting link with that [descended] tranquility, providing security in the soul and spirit of human beings.

In the relationship of woman and man, as well as in the laws of marriage, the first thing that can be seen is to prevent and remove conflict. That is, the first thing that makes these two

human beings act like spouses, get close to one another and put aside the [feeling of] strangeness is the prevention and removal of conflict. If this is fulfilled, then the meaning of spousal relations is realized; otherwise, it will not materialize. If the wife and husband base their intent and will on this, to prevent and remove conflicts and bumps with thoughtfulness and kindness, they will understand the meaning of marriage. But if they are still entangled with small matters that create daily conflict, they will never experience the sweet taste of marriage. They will never reach this Divine sweetness. That is the first point.

The second point in this verse that should be considered is that Allah (swt) says: "... *and instilled love and compassion between you.*" Allah (swt) has put *"mawaddat/love"* and *"rahmat/compassion"* between them [husband and wife]. Here we are discussing the second point of this verse, which is *"mawaddat/love."* In Farsi, we translate the word *"mawaddat"* as *"muhabbat/kindness."* But *"mawaddat"* is deeper than *"muhabbat."* That is, it is never sufficient to say that the second principle between wife and husband, these two phenomena of creation, these two beings in the divine family system, is [just] *"muhabbat/kindness."* No. *"Muhabbat/kindness"* is not enough.

The word *"mawaddat"* has a very heavy and deep meaning in the Arabic language. As this has been explained for some of you, here I will say just a few words *en passant*. Sometimes this question is asked why, despite the grandeur and beauty that the word *"'eshq/love"* has, the pleasant joy that is seen in the word *"'eshq,"* all the sweet memories that come to our minds when we think of it, in spite of all these, we do not have this word in the Holy Qur'an. While we know that this is an Arabic term. It is derived from the word *"'ashaqah."* *"'Ashaqah"* is the ivy plant that grows around the trunk of trees, and that never stops going up. But if it is

cut or separated from the trunk of the tree it dies, indicating that without belonging and attachment, *"'eshq"* has no meaning. The word *"'eshq"* is from *"'ashaqah,"* but it has not been used in the Holy Qur'an. In fact, none of its derivatives is seen in the Holy Qur'an. We do not have it among the words of the religious leaders in the early days of Islam. It is used only once, negatively, in *"Nahj-ul-Balaagha,"* in the statement that *"whoever falls in love with a thing, his eyes become blind and his heart becomes sick."* He cannot see and think correctly and accurately. That is all against *"'eshq,"* while we are devoted to *"'eshq," [to love and to be loved].*

'Eshq makes my life difficult,
I lose my home for my heart's desire.
Any time I say I'll escape from 'eshq,
'Eshq arrives there before me.

Whatever I say to explain 'eshq,
When I reach 'eshq, I become embarrassed.
Everything is the beloved and the lover is a slave,
Alive is the beloved and dead is the lover.

Well this has a very strange story, going as high as:

"'Eshq/love is the astrolabe of the secrets of God,
The cause of "'aasheq/lover" is separate from [all] causes"

This indicates that the station of *"'eshq/love"* is splendidly high, indeed. But again, we see that it is not among the divine words [in the Holy Qur'an]. Why? This is a question that always exists. The answer is that at the time of the revelation of the Qur'an, the word *"'eshq"* for love was wrongly confiscated. Meaning that, at that time, if any literary Arab who was a person of letters, a literary critic,

and knew literature, was asked what is the meaning of *"'eshq,"* s/he would have said it is the heat that is generated by the touching of two bodies. They did not understand any other meaning for the word *"'eshq,"* or love. That was what they understood. Nothing else. To them it was a state of physical and color-stained feeling, one that was not congruent with the magnificent meaning of the word *"'eshq/love,"* the indescribable state of both very high and deep feelings, longing, and overwhelmingly beloved-focused experience; instead, they focused on the kind of *"'eshq"* that brings shame:

'Eshq-haa-ei kaz pay-e rangui bovad
Love which is after color,
'Eshq nabvad aaqebat nangui bovad.
That is not love, it is disgrace.

Thus, the Holy Qur'an has not used this word *"'eshq"* for love at all. Later on, when such a shallow meaning was gradually removed to some extent, then we notice that the word *"'eshq"* [for true magnificent love] is used by the religious leaders [Infallible Imams, scholars, mystics, and poets] in religious narratives with different meanings, such as, *"Man 'ashaqa le-'ebaadeh, fa'unoqahou,"* meaning, by our understanding, that whoever loves to worship and embraces worshipping, Allah (swt) embraces him. We see through the statement of the Holy Prophet (pbuh) an exalted station for this short expression. Similarly, in the subsequent centuries there are other high-minded statements [about the meaning and understanding of *"'eshq/love"*] by the Infallibles (pbut).

However, instead of the word *"'eshq,"* the Holy Qur'an uses another term, *"mawaddah,"* which expresses the ultimate state of love and the peak of adoration [and affection] par excellence. It is from the root word *"wudd/wadd, [meaning,*

among others, love, affection, friendship, amity, be fond of]." When we look at the lexical specifications of the word "*mawaddah,*" we see four points in it.

One: "*Mawadda/mawaddah/mawaddat*" is a [kind of] love that exists because of the very self of the beloved. For, if you like [or love] something due to your own personal pleasure, that is called "*hub/love, affection, attachment,*" but it is not "*mawaddat.*" If you like something for the sake of its side benefits and enjoyment:

These fraud friends that you see,
Are flies around confection.

As such, that is "*muhabbat,*" but not "*mawaddat.*" If you like a being because of the merit of its very self-being, because of the essence of its personality and its existence, not because of your enjoyment and benefit, that is called "*mawaddat.*"

Two: "*Mawaddat*" is a responsibility-generating love. It is possible that we like many things; I might enjoy images that I see on television and like them. What responsibility do I have toward the beautiful image that I see? "*Mawaddat*" is the kind of love that has responsibility and commitment instilled in its essence.

Three: It is possible that someone is filled with [the love of] a beloved but dares not express it. Often, this love remains buried all the way to the grave. This is called "*muhabbat,*" not "*mawaddat.*" "*Mawaddat*" is the love that should be expressed. Now, this expression has two tongues, sometimes by the tongue in the mouth, sometimes by the tongue of action. When love is not expressed because some people are avaricious, they have no desire to express their love by tongue. They either do not dare, or they are cautious.

They cannot be considered as people of *"mawaddat/love."* People of love are those who put their love in the palm of their hand and offer it to the beloved, and leave it at the disposal of the *"ma'shooq/beloved."* Hence, the tongue of action is more expressive. When the love is seen in action, and offered [along] with expression to the beloved, the name of this is *"mawaddat."*

Four: "*Muhabbat*" sometimes is and sometimes is not. [As Hafiz says:]

I am the slave of the Pir of the tavern (the perfect Murshid),
whose favor is constant:
If not, the favor of the Shaikh and of the Zahid, is
sometimes; and, sometimes is not.

The love that is interrupted is not *"mawaddat."* If love is constant and without interruption in all conditions, whether at the time of hardship or ease, at the time of difficulty, at the time of comfort, in poverty, in prosperity, *"mawaddat"* is lasting. [So similar to the formulation of the marriage vows, "... take this person in sickness and in health, for richer or poorer..."]. Such a love can be adorned with the crown of *"mawaddat"* and be called love.

Hence, four special characteristics are seen here [for *"mawaddat"*]. Here, it should be added that the spousal relations [and *"mawaddat"*] between wife and husband [is equated] with the verse of *"mawaddat"* toward the relatives of the Prophet (pbuh):

Say (O Muhammad): "I do not ask of you any recompense
for it (the toils of prophetship)
save love of (my) relatives."
(Q42:23)

So that the [straight path toward Allah (swt)] will not be lost, the word *"mawaddat"* is used regarding the household of the Prophet (pbuh) in the Holy Qur'an, and not the word *"muhabbat."* In this case, precisely the above four characteristics apply. That is to love this family for their own sake, not the way it is among some of us. When there is a problem and an entanglement in my life, I call upon [Allah (swt) to help me for the sake of the Prophet, his purified daughter Fatimah or any of the 12 Infallible Imams, such as Imam] Ali ibn Musa Al-Reza (pbut), regrettably using them like an employment agency, invoking their names when I need something; and I have nothing to do with them when everything is moving according to my desire. This can never be considered true *"mawaddat."*

This kind of love [toward the Prophet and his family (pbut)] is superficial *"mawaddat"*-like love. "*Mawaddat*" toward them must include action. We claim that their *"'eshq/love*" is in our hearts, and if our vein is cut, the call of *Laily, Laily* and *Ali, Ali* can be heard from every drop of my blood. But when at the time of action, we have no understanding of who they are, and no real action is made [to demonstrate our true love], how can that be called *"mawaddat?"* We might think that we love the Prophet and his household (pbut), but their love and *"mawaddat"* should be seen not only in our words, but rather in our actions and behavior also.

By the same token, Allah (swt) has made spousal relations to be based on *"mawaddat"* in an actual, constant, responsible form. Indeed, *"mawaddat"* should exist between wife and husband. Here only topics are listed [in an outline form], the explanation and the analysis of which require the proper occasion and session, so that discussing such relationship is done with the required sensitivity, without certain considerations.

The third word to consider in the verse is *"rahmah/compassion,"* that Allah (swt) instills between wife and husband. The third pillar by which spousal relations is actualized is *"rahmah;"* otherwise, it will not materialize. Affection, kindness, indulgence, if these are practiced between these two, husband and wife, then the expected and complete perfection and likeness is realized. Otherwise, barriers [conflicts] occurring between them will make the spousal relationship very difficult, and the fulfillment of marriage and benefiting from its potentials become null.

This is the most important verse that was explained above. The next verse, also beautiful, bears tangible communal and societal meanings. Let me make this important point inside a parenthesis. One of the major aspects of discussing Qur'anic topics is that we sometimes have a very simple matter at hand, which is neither complicated nor difficult, yet when presenting it, we stretch and paint a popular subject with so much expertise that neither common people understand it nor experts. Neither ordinary people, nor people of knowledge and learning understand. While some think that we speak beyond their comprehension, others making compliments, might say that was a good speech, without understanding what Qur'an says. Nothing more, nothing less.

But the Holy Qur'an does not do that. The Qur'an's language is not like that. Allah (swt) in the Qur'an presents special topics with the language of common people, and not common matters in a special language [of the learned], which is exactly contrary to what some do. Allah (swt) offers the most subtle and most delicate matters in frames, phrases, and references the meaning of which everyone understands, while at the same time when the levels and the layers of the word in some cases are opened, certain

meanings from the inside of these layers appear that project the following expression: *"My poem has a very special and amazing meaning."* Consider the following example.

Verse 187 of Surah *Al-Baqarah*/2 in the Holy Qur'an is a clear response to those who thought copulation between husband and wife during the nights of Ramadhan [month of fasting] is not permitted, assuming that because this is the month of supplication and asceticism, therefore, sexual relations [between husband and wife] are contrary to the spirit of Ramadhan. The Holy Qur'an said no, that is not the case. There is no contradiction between the two acts. Because copulation takes place in the frame of spousal relations, it is no longer an abstract act. We should see this at the service of the spirit, which is a part of the spousal agreement. It is sacred. Again many things cannot be explained explicitly. People interested in research can refer to the traditions about this matter in *Wassaael Al-Shi'ah*, and see what virtues and benefactions are narrated from our infallible leaders for the sexual act between husband and wife. It is really amazing. It would have been so effectively useful if we could discuss these matters more explicitly, as much as necessary for educational purposes [and accurate understanding], in an open public forum, without having to deal with certain undesirable side effects.

Well, this inaccurate thought existed that copulation between husband and wife is contrary to the spirit of Ramadhan. The Holy Qur'an said no:

It is made lawful to you to lie with your wives on the nights of the fast; they are a garment for and you are a garment for them.

Indicating that there is no problem. You are free for your special spousal relations in the nights of Ramadhan. For,

indeed, you are one another's garment. Here, Qur'an strikes a forceful point, meaningful, deep, dear to the heart and encompassing, likening the spousal relations to wife being the garment of husband, and husband being the garment of wife. Now, what do we understand and acquire from this eloquent comparison? Four points.

First: What is [physically] closer to a human being than cloth or garment? The one that touches our body and is our constant confidant, is our garment, is what we wear. Likewise, the closest relation between two human beings is the relation between wife and husband. They are [one another's] garment. The expression of garment vis a vis our body, beautifully and so effectively shows the degree of closeness in the relationship between husband and wife. Hence, we see in the Qur'an that the terms "*saaheb*" and/or "*saahebah*" are also used, relating to husband and wife, accordingly. What does Allah (swt) mean when He says: *"He [Allah (swt)] has taken neither a wife nor a son [child]"* (Q72:3)? It means that Allah (swt) has not established a family; He has neither a wife nor a child. Here, we see that the word *"saahebah"* means spouse, while *"saaheb"* also means spouse. Interestingly, the word "*mossaahebat*" means companionship and everlasting closeness. That is the first point regarding garment.

Second: The next specification is that a garment provides covering. Garments cover the body. As you know, when you look at the customs of the ancient world, 2500 years ago, and the periods before that, of this land [Iran], we read in Ferdawsi's *Shahnaamah*:

Manizheh manam dokht-e Afraasiyaab,
I am Manizheh, Afraasiyaab's daughter,

Berahneh nadeedeh tanash aaftaab.
Whose body has not been seen by sunshine.

You see that the body of Manizheh the princess is not touched by sunshine or moonlight. You see in the context of this civilization there is a covering. [But when you see some other cultures,] you notice the word dress, from the Latin root, "directus," some of its meanings being to decorate, trim, adorn, exhibit, display, show off and so forth. In our literature, when society is discussed with regard to garment, you have clothing, covering, underwear, top wear, overall clothing, body covering, good covering, bad covering, chic covering, torn/old covering, in all of these you have covering. All of them relate to covering. In some other cultures, garment is associated with exhibition and adornment. These are two different views of clothing. Though the Holy Qur'an (7:26) corrects and confirms both points of view:

"O children of Adam! We have sent down to you a garment that would both cover your shame and be an adornment; and raiment of piety is best." This is of the signs of Allah that they may keep in mind.

This garment has two functions. Its first function is to *"cover your shame, ..."* (Q7:26), to cover parts of your body that:

Maslahat aan nist keh az pardah boroon oftad raaz.
It is not right that the secrets come out from behind the curtain.

So the first emphasis is on covering, then the second emphasis on the function of garment is adornment, both being reminded and confirmed by the Qur'an, preserving the sequence and level of both functions of garment, avoiding any excess and/or waste. Thus the second function that garment has is covering, that the Holy Qur'an relates to as

"*cover your shame.*" Indicating that husband and wife should cover one another's shame. This becomes the complete perfection of spousal relations. Hand in hand they must remove the unsightly deeds of one another. They should be able to see one another's shortcomings, which requires precise and reciprocal understanding of each other, so that they can be helpful to one another, be able to declare:

Biyaa taa yaar-e ham, ghamkhaar-e ham, deldaar-e ham baasheem
Come! Let's be friends, caring, and each other's confidant.

By that they can help each other to remove undesirable natural and/or behavioral dispositions between them. All of these are instilled in the beautiful example of garment.

Third: The third function of garment is *"adornment"* (Q7:26). Husband and wife must be each other's *"adornment."* The marriage must adorn both of them. First, trimming [the undesirable], then adorning [the desirable]. Garments cover the undesirable and adorn the desirable. Husband and wife are actors of both trimming and adorning each other. Marriage increases one another's goodness. One of the blessings of this sacred covenant, and this intimacy, this same-heartedness and this consentience that have come to be, is that it must be adorned.

Fourth: What garment does is to protect. The Holy Qur'an (16:81) says:

He [Allah (swt)] has made garments for you to protect you

Wife and husband, too, must be protector of everything of each other. They must be protector of each other's love, covenant, loyalty, beauty and excellence. And they must take responsibility for this protection of each other, on the

stage of their life and in the atmosphere of spousal relations. Again, this is a beautiful metaphor in the Holy Qur'an. Although I enumerated only four points, there are certainly many more than these, whether in the above discussed verses or verses before and after them.

Another verse, which is so delicate, pleasant, and at the same time rather provocative, relates to one of the questions I received from the ladies, asking what kind of comparison it is that Allah (swt) is making in Q2:223:

Your women are a tilth for you, so enter your tillage as you please. And send good deeds in advance for yourselves, and safeguard yourselves with full awareness of Allah's laws, and know that you will meet Him. And give glad tidings to the believers.

What comparison is this that Allah (swt) relates? Your wives are your *"harth* [meaning *'mahrath'*]"? Here it means farm, or field under cultivation. What connection is made in the mind of the addressee? What is this metaphor trying to teach? Why is this [kind of] metaphor needed? I offer six points, though sometimes in the context of interpreting the Holy Qur'an, I have made up to twelve points. Here, I present six of them for you to see what delicate points come to mind with this socially tangible common expression, and what can be benefited from this single word, in a short phrase, which avoids long explanations, heavy and lengthy sentences.

One: The first observable point in this beautiful and clear comparison is that, for their survival, human beings need *"harth [land for cultivation]."* If there were no cultivation, no child of Adam would have remained on the earth. Allah (swt) has made our existence to be more agreeable and compatible with plant nutrition than animal. Our teeth are

grinders rather than fangs. Our stomach is more prepared to digest plants than non-plant foods. Basically, due to our physio-biological structure, we are encouraged, with clear emphasis, toward consumption of mostly fiber products in our food basket. Principally, the human race on the earth needs to cultivate. *"Harth,"* cultivating and farming land, has been the most [essential] human acquisition on the earth. *"Your women are a tilth for you,"* is the first point that is exemplified in this comparison, indicating the state and the necessity of spousal relations between wife and husband. That is, for the survival, continuity and perpetuity of human beings on the earth, this is a quite relevant and eloquent likening by Allah (swt) to show the necessity of marriage.

Two: Now that we need to cultivate the land, in what kind of land do we do that? Should there be pre-conditions regarding method, requirement, selection, air, space, time and place? It is said:

Zameen-e shooreh haassel bar nayaarad
Daroo tokhm-e amal zaaye' magardaan
Salt land does not yield produce
Do not waste the seed of action in it

When the matter of *"harth [cultivation]"* is discussed, what considerations come up? Attentiveness, complete perseverance, making the most proper choice are among the essential needs for good cultivation. Marriage needs the same things, from both sides. Choosing properly must be done with special attention. There must be a criterion, as there is one in *"harth [cultivating land],"* such as the appropriateness of land, seed, condition of water, air, year, sun, moon, all of them need to be considered. By the same token, regarding the relationship between man and woman, commensurately everything should be carefully analyzed. Should they be carefully choosing? Our criterion is intellect.

If the criterion is intellect, then that is an acceptable criterion. Is it belief? That is an acceptable one. The reason Islam advises to be mindful before marriage toward the concepts of *"kofviyyat [equality]"* or *"hamsary [same mindedness],"* and *"hamsangui [equiponderance],"* is because when at the beginning of choosing a spouse such care and attentiveness are not present, it usually ends with separation and nullification of marriage. But when these considerations and disciplines are practiced before marriage, we can see and feel completely the continuity and perpetuity. In our own society, we can see both types. Common people in the past used to say:

Before the beginning of married life, for choosing a spouse, keep your both eyes open. Then for the continuity of marriage, close one eye and open the other one.

With their folksy expressions, they made quite vital points. The carefulness in choosing [a spouse] is, indeed, a very important and serious matter. The Holy Qur'an reminds us of this through the word *"harth [cultivating land],"* with its acceptable criteria to the people of intellect and in accordance with familial and social necessities.

Three: In *"harth [cultivation],"* which plant is it that does not need moment-to-moment care and protection? Which plant is it that needs not sufficient attention? And neglecting a plant would ruin all efforts. With this [commonly understandable and all-encompassing allegory], *"harthon lakom [tilth for you],"* the Holy Qur'an clearly reminds the husband and wife of their covenant and promise to one another, about the consideration and attention that they must have toward each other, and that no neglect of the other should take place between them, that some of these neglects are not compensable, that is when husband and wife do not pay the necessary attention toward each other, and the

required fulfillment of obligation is not seen between them, or there is not sufficient care between them, whether in economic terms, security, or states of emotion and love.

Four: Wilted, withered and languid *"harth/farm/plant"* has no beauty.

Baagh nagoo, daagh goo, chon nist daroo gol
Do not call it garden, call it scorched,
since there is no flower in it.

This kind of place is not called a *"harth/farm/garden/plant"* for cultivation. A farm is a place that when a breeze blows over it [and rain falls on] it, its freshness and liveliness cause cheerfulness and happiness. The Holy Qur'an (22:5) describes it:

You behold the earth all withered,
but when We send down rain upon it,
it bestirs itself, swells, and brings forth
every kind of attractive herbage.

There will come brightness. Otherwise, it would not be a farm, garden, orchard, and so forth. Emphasis on the word *"harth"* points to all the above. A cheerful atmosphere between husband and wife should prevail. There must be happy-heartedness, pleasant thoughts and good feelings between them. If there is indifference, lack of flourishing, and boredom between husband and wife, their spousal relations would not find the precise and correct form, and the expected enjoyment and joyful fulfillment of desires would not be realized.

One depressed person makes the whole group depressed.

In married life, all these specifications, along with timeliness and meeting opportunities must be considered in order to provide for complete success of this relationship.

Five: A farm, or any land to be cultivated finds its maturity and completion when its boundaries are set and protected from undesirable intruders. It is not for whoever wants to come and go, to do so. If this were a farm that had no protection and security, had no boundary, and if it were a commuting place for ill-wishers, where people come and go through every side of it, using it as a passage, then no one could be expected to plant anything in such a farm. If it is a *"harth [farmland for cultivation],"* then it is vital to have a private sanctuary. The private boundary around husband and wife must be completely observed. All rules that guarantee the protection and security of their spousal relationship must be attentively observed.

I do not want this to be a discussion of religious jurisprudence, lecturing or advising anyone about a moral point of view. But the above allegorical points, presented under the same natural and commonly understood rules are the very same limits related to permissible and/or non-permissible Qur'anic relations between man and woman, and only their careful observance can guarantee the continuity of the healthy relationship between man and woman, wife and husband, healthy, happy and lasting marriage. On the other hand, their lack of observance strikes a serious blow to the existence of *"mawaddat [love]."* The tree of marriage requires protection, care and constant attentiveness in order to grow fully and reproduce.

The attentive protection that Allah (swt) calls for (Q4:34) for a lasting marriage relates to certain characteristics of both man and woman, and that is that they be *"guarding the hidden which Allah has guarded."* That husband and wife

protect themselves, their being [body and soul] from every calamity for their spouse, whether wife in relation to husband, or husband with regard to wife. Let there not be any sexual infidelity between husband and wife. Such infidelity is possible to begin by one look, or through continuous ogling. The wife or husband, who does not trust their spouse and sees that their spouse has let go of his/her responsibility and covenant, has come to feel "free" and has no care, self-discipline or sexual ethics, becomes heart-broken, which leads to spousal suspicion, [leading to other more difficult situations, from which destructive weeds grow in the farmland of marriage] all of which bring about disagreement, and sexual insecurity between wife and husband.

Six: The last point about *"harth [farming]"* is that no one can prevent the owner from coming and going to the farm. A farm is desirable when its owner can look after and benefit from its produce. In that case it prospers, and not otherwise. The relationship between wife and husband must be as such. It must be transparent and alive. All the characteristics of a healthy farm should exist in spousal relations. There should be no limit or prohibition, other than logical or religious edicts, based on natural, physical and/or legal considerations; there should be no restriction or limitation [between husband and wife, in which case]:

Do not seek any formality and arrangement;
Say whatever your heart wishes.

Hence, the above six points metaphorically describe the meaning of: *"Your women are a tilth for you, ..."* (Q2:223).

However, it should be repeated that there can be many other explanations of the short phrase of the above verse. Nevertheless, there is one more explanation related to the

word *"lakom [for you]"* that needs to be elaborated further. What is this word *"lakom [for you]"*? What is its [accurate] meaning? Sometimes, some people have maneuvered around this word, [indicating that] the Holy Qur'an is addressing only the men. Instead, we believe there are situations where it is a general address [toward men and women] and that it makes no difference whether it is a man or a woman. Allah (swt) considers the same thing for men; both sides are included.

Yet, this word *"lakom [for you]"* somewhat tickles the mind, [looking for clarification of its meaning and application]. The letter *"laam/la"* is a possessive *"laam,"* relating to benefit. *"Lakom [for you],"* specially when someone reads it in a way similar to [the inaccurate meaning and interpretation of] the word *"qawwaamoun [authority]"* (Q4:34); and here reading the *"harthon lakom [tilth for you],"* [as exclusively to the benefit of men is not an accurate reading].

As you know, there are three possibilities about [the meaning of the letter *"laam"* in the word] *"lakom [for you]."* The first possibility is that this is the *"laam"* of ownership. Ownership of what? We have two types of ownerships. One is the ownership of the very thing itself, meaning that sometimes you own something itself, and sometimes you own the use of something. Sometimes you give a book to someone, and sometimes you give a book to someone to use for twenty-four hours, expecting it to be returned to you after that. Is there such a relationship between husband and wife? In the case of wife and husband, what type of *"laam"* of ownership is meant in the word *"lakom [for you]"*? Is it possible to transfer the ownership of the existence of woman or man to another person? Absolutely not. This is not of that type. That has no *"lakom."* Is it possible to transfer the benefiting of it? It existed during the *"jaaheliyyah [era of*

ignorance]" when there was one kind of marriage, called *"nekaah estebdaal [exchange marriage]."* In modern [and post modern] eras, there are other kinds of [sexual] exchange. Among the Arabs during the ignorant era, a man would tell his friend: *"Estabdela an zawjek [exchange your wife]."* Come let me have your wife, and you have mine for a week. They exchanged wives with such impudence and obscenity.

There is no spousal consignment [in Islam]. Then what is this *"lakom?"* This is neither the ownership of the exact thing, nor ownership of profiting from its usage. Rather, it means that wife and husband benefit, mutually, from one another. Benefiting from someone is not transferable. This is not something that anyone can transfer to another person. This is not ownership. Rather it is a reciprocal right of benefiting in spousal relations; the word *"lakom"* implies that this right belongs to husband and wife. Allah (swt) intends this to be the meaning of *"lakom."*

The last point I would like to mention is from (Q4:19), where Allah (swt) indicates: *"... 'aasherouhonna bel-ma'rouf [deal kindly with them/with one another]...,"* which is a very delicate point, reminding that if you want this spousal relationship to have a sweet and pleasant meaning, deal with one another kindly, indicating that husband and wife must establish between themselves a principle of kindness in the relationship *"... 'aasherouhonna bel-ma'rouf."* Based on this principle, they should establish a beautiful and kind co-existence, so that from the minutes and moments of being together, they may enjoy the ultimate benefits and excellent pleasures. All of this is in line with the words of Allah (swt) in the actualization, completion, perfection, congruency, and likeness of the meaning of spousal relations.