

Nurturing Marital Love

He bounded up the stairs so energetically that it was hard for me to believe that here was a man of more than eighty years. He had the vitality of a youth. Then I learned the reason why:

Though he had gotten married back in 1947 when he was about thirty years old, he was able to say to me: "I do not recall that I ever once got angry with my wife or that she was even once annoyed with me. And if I had a headache, it was impossible for her to sleep until after I fell asleep."

Then he said with feeling: "I can never think of going out somewhere, even to purchase some household needs, without taking her with me and holding her hand. It is as if we are newlyweds."

When, due to a medical operation, she had become unable to bear children, he said to her: "You are more precious to me than children."

He told me: "As long as she walks upon the Earth, I could never even think of marrying anyone else."

That man is a good example of how devotion can last even into old age. Unfortunately, when we look at the state of the majority of people of any age, we can appreciate that his relationship is a rarity indeed, a sort of ideal.

Of course, we do not have to be held to such an ideal. Moreover, we should not go to our spouses and expect them to be like that when we ourselves have so many shortcomings.

Marriage is love and affection. Allah says: "He created for you mates from among yourselves so that you can seek comfort in them and He has placed between you affection and mercy."
[Sûrah al-Rûm: 21]

This is why each sex is drawn to the other in the first place, as if each person is looking for his missing other half.

When the wife of the famous jurist Abû Rabî`ah died, he carried out her burial himself and had to wipe the dirt from his own hands. However, when he returned home, he was overcome with grief and lamented to his Lord, his eyes filling with tears: *“Now...my home has died as well. The home only lives for the woman who dwells inside it.*

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Marital love requires extraordinary effort from both parties if it is to last and remain vital. The difficulty of marital love does not lie in those small disagreements that are a normal part of everyday life and that all couples have to work out. Indeed, such problems sometimes revitalize the relationship, like spice in a savory dish.

The real problem lies in three things:

1. The inability of one person to understand the other. Indeed sometimes a person even has difficulty understanding his own self.
2. The inability of a person to adapt to the partnership that is marriage and the inability to cope with the life changes that it brings. Many people expect things to remain the same as they were before.
3. The most important problem is a lack of commitment to the relationship and to making it last.

This is why it is necessary for people to understand “the rules of the game” when it comes to love.

Ten ways to achieve lasting love:

Since marital love is prone to sickness and even death, it is imperative for couples to constantly work to revitalize and preserve it.

Husbands and wives must do the following:

1. They have to get in the habit of saying things that are positive, like offering compliments and like making little prayers for each other.

A husband could say to his wife: "If I were sent back to the days of my youth, I would not choose for a wife anyone besides you." Of course, the wife can easily say something similar to her husband.

Affectionate words have an effect, especially on women. They have, indeed, often been the weapons used by unscrupulous men to gain access to what is not theirs.

Sweet words arouse a woman's heart. A husband should take care to say them to his wife before someone else does.

2. Husbands and wives have to get into the habit of doing those little things that mean so much. If a man comes home to find his wife asleep, he can cover her and tuck her into bed.

A husband can give his wife a call from work just to say hello and to let her know that he is thinking about her.

If a wife finds that her husband has fallen asleep, she can give him a little kiss on the forehead, even if she thinks that he will not be aware of it. Indeed, on some level his senses are working even though he is asleep and he may very well be aware of it.

The Prophet (peace be upon him) emphasized the value of these little things, "...even the morsel of food that you place in your wife's mouth..." [Sahîh al-Bukhârî and Sahîh Muslim]

It may very well be that the Prophet (peace be upon him) was alluding to the expenditure of a man for his wife's needs. Nonetheless, the Prophet (peace be upon him) chose to express it in the way he did for a reason. Most importantly, this is the way the Prophet (peace be upon him) conducted himself with his family.

This type of behavior is governed by the tastes of the people involved. It may take some getting used to, but it really does not take a lot of effort.

3. A person who is not accustomed to such things may feel embarrassed just hearing about them and may prefer to leave matters the way they are rather than try to change his behavior and do things that he might see as ridiculous.

Still, we must be willing introduce new habits into our lives if we do not want our problems to go on forever.

The husband and wife must set aside time to talk to each other. They should talk about the past; reminisce about the good times. Talking about them keeps them fresh in our minds as if they had happened only yesterday. They should talk about the future and share their hopes and their plans. They should also talk about the present, both the good and bad of it, and discuss different ways to solve their problems.

4. Keeping close physical contact is good for the relationship. This is not just for times of intimacy, but at all times, like when sitting in the lounge or walking down the street. This is regardless of the fact that there are still men in our society who are ashamed to have people see them walking in public with their wives at their sides.

5. Emotional support should be guaranteed whenever it is required. When the wife is pregnant or on her monthly period, she may need her husband to lend her a little moral support.

He should take her mental state into consideration. Medical experts attest to the fact that when women go through pregnancy, menstruation, or postpartum bleeding, they suffer from psychological stress that can adversely affect their behavior. It is at times like these that a woman needs her husband's support. She needs him to let her know how much she means to him and how much he needs her in his life.

Likewise, the husband might fall ill or come under a lot of difficulties. The wife must take these things into consideration. If people want their relationship to last, they must let each other feel that support.

6. There have to be some material expressions of love. Gifts should be given, sometimes without there being any occasion for it, since a pleasant surprise is always welcome. A good gift is one that expresses feelings of affection. It does not have to be expensive, but it has to be appropriate for the other's tastes and personality; something that will be cherished.

7. The husband and wife have to learn how to be more tolerant of each other and overlook one another's shortcomings. It should become a habit to forget about the little mistakes of daily life and not even bring them up. Silence in these trivialities is a sign of noble character.

A woman said to A'ishah: "When my husband comes home, he becomes like a cat. When he goes out, he becomes like a lion. He does not ask about what might have happened." [Sahîh al-Bukhârî and Sahîh Muslim]

Ibn Hajar explains her words as follows:

They might mean that he is very generous and tolerant. He does not make a big fuss about what goes missing of his wealth. If he brings something for the house, he does not enquire about it later on. He does not make an issue of the shortcomings that he might see at home but instead is clement and tolerant.

It is wrong to go overboard in considering the faults of others but when it comes to ourselves, keep a running account of all our good qualities.

8. There is a tradition that goes: “*One of you sees the dust in his brother’s eyes and forgets about the dirt in his own.*”

A husband and wife must come to an understanding when it comes to matters of mutual concern, like the raising of children, work, travel, expenses, and problems that might pose a threat to the marital relationship.

9. Husbands and wives need to do things to liven up their relationship. Each one of them can read a book or listen to a cassette that might give them some ideas on how they can revitalize their marital life and bring more meaning to it. They can vary their habits when it comes to relaxing together, dining, taking refreshments, decorating their home, and in relating to each other both openly and intimately. These are the things that keep up the excitement and interest in a relationship.

10. The relationship must be protected from negative influences that can harm it. One of the worst of these is the habit of comparing one’s spouse to others. Many men tend to compare their wives to those of other men. Some even compare them with the faces they see in magazines and on television. Women also compare their husbands with other women’s husbands in things like wealth, looks, and how many times he takes her out. All of this makes people feel bad and insufficient and it can ruin the marital relationship.

If we must compare ourselves to others, we should do so with those who have less going for them than ourselves. Allah’s Messenger (peace be upon him) said: “Look towards those who are beneath you and do not look towards those who are above you. This is better so that you do not belittle Allah’s blessings.”

[Sahîh al-Bukhârî and Sahîh Muslim]

We must accustom ourselves to living in the real world and to finding contentment in what Allah has decreed for us. We should not look longingly at what others have been given. Whatever little that we have will be a lot if we utilize it well.

It is quite possible that many who speak about their marital bliss and go on boasting about

their husbands and wives are untruthful in what they say. They just like to brag.

The grass often does seem greener on the other side, but only because we are not looking at it up close.

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