

# Beauty AND THE BEAST

*The Higher Purpose of Marriage*



Kamlesh D. Patel shares some thoughts on how marriage ennobles and enriches our lives, supports our evolution and provides a happy, stable base for family life.

The other day, I was lucky enough to observe an elderly couple taking a stroll along the river in Princeton, their steps totally in sync. You could see they had been together a long time. They hardly spoke, communicating their togetherness in more subtle ways. Eventually they reached a park bench overlooking the river, pulled out a flask of tea and some sandwiches, and together enjoyed their little feast in perfect silence. Their movements were so in tune it seemed for a moment like one person was moving. The way she poured the tea was full of gentleness and care, as was the way he received the cup. They ate their sandwiches and enjoyed the stillness of the riverside.

They had reached a stage in their marriage of purity in connection and communion. Did this happen as a result of a life full of perfect harmony and ease? I doubt it. Did they have arguments about how to discipline their children, and how much money was spent last month? Probably. Most couples evolve to this stage in their relationship by going through struggles and difficulties, by sacrificing their personal wishes, and by raising children, grandchildren and sometimes great grandchildren.

This is the other end of the spectrum from the heady days of the young love of newly-weds, when a couple is much more physical and verbal in their demonstration of love. That is, if there is love in the relationship. We will get to that later on.

So which one is better – the exciting early days of romance, or the halcyon days of an elderly couple? This seems like a silly question, given that it is obvious they are different stages in the evolution of a marriage, both relevant and both important. It would be a silly question, except for the fact that today most marriages in the West, and an increasing number in the East, do not last the distance!

It is worth examining why. What comes between the beginning and the end? Why is it that in today's world so many marriages end in divorce? Is it because marriage is an outdated institution? I would say "No," it is because we do not understand the purpose and stages of marriages, and the nature of love.

It is easy to see how problems happen. The daily grind of modern life is not kind to relationships. Often both parents work long hours in order to save enough money to pay for their children's education and buy a house, and city dwellers are bombarded by all sorts of environmental pollution and stress. So by the end of a hectic day, there is little energy left to take care of each other and be kind.

But do you think this is any harder than living with war, famine, plagues or slavery – all situations that existed for our ancestors? We can easily blame circumstances for the failing



marriages of today, but in many ways human beings have never had it easier.

It is also that after the joyous whirlwind of a wedding, there comes the reality of living together, accepting each other's imperfections and learning how to adjust to the new dynamics of a relationship. When two imperfect beings come together, there is bound to be some friction and adjustment. And if the couple lives with extended family, there are even more components in the new dynamic.

It is often not at the beginning or the end that marriages falter, but in the middle when the struggles are greatest. So what makes the difference between a couple that is able to stay with the evolutionary process of marriage and one that does not?

As more and more youngsters look for answers to such questions, where reason and emotions converge, where tradition and contemporary thinking meet, and perhaps, where science and spirituality meet, there is a need for a very relevant and practical approach to relationships that also encompasses the wisdom of the ages.

So let's start with some ancient wisdom that can help.

In Yogic philosophy, we learn about the 3 human types: *sattvik*, *rajasic* and *tamasic*. We are all a mixture of the three, but generally one predominates in our make up, and this can change as we evolve.

*Tamasic* behavior is characterized by ignorance and inertia. A tamasic person is often lethargic, prone to violence, and mistrust. *Rajasic* behavior is characterized by action and passion. A *rajasic* person is one who is often focused on satisfying his own personal desires, gain and prosperity. *Sattvik* behavior is characterized by purity and wisdom. A *sattvik* person cheerfully serves others without any expectation of personal benefit.

These three qualities pervade everything we do – the way we walk, talk and eat, and even the way we breathe! What happens to our breath when we experience intense anger? The nostrils flare and our breath is long, loud and chaotic; *tamasic* in nature. On the other hand, when we are in the state of *samadhi* or deep meditation, our breathing is so quiet and calm that we hardly notice it. It flows so naturally and so effortlessly, which is *sattvik* in nature.

These qualities play out in all our interactions with others, and are very evident in our closest relationships. As a result, marriages are also associated with one of these three types.

A *tamasic* marriage is based on individual gain. The couple is coming together for benefit. For example, the groom might be focused solely on the financial status of the bride's family, or gaining a trophy wife. Alternatively, the bride might be marrying someone much older for money, status or access to an easy visa. Such marriages are transactional in nature, based on

narcissistic or self-centered behavior, and can easily result in mutual distrust and discord. A spouse is a commodity to provide status, pleasure or service.

Today, many marriages are *rajasic*, based on mutual love and respect, and also mutual desire and benefit. But although there may be mutual respect, the love is not totally pure and unconditional, as there is expectation. So when the other person is flawed and imperfect, as we all are, there is disappointment and trouble in paradise.

A *sattvik* relationship is one in which the two partners don't think of themselves as individuals, but as one. They cheerfully sacrifice everything for the relationship and each other. There is a wonderful short story by O. Henry called '*The Gift of the Magi*' about such a young couple. In a *sattvik* marriage there is purity of intent, and no concern about physical deficiencies or financial status. Communion, mutual growth and unconditional love are at the core of the marriage. In *sattvik* marriages, the best emerges over a period of time, as the family is based on giving and love, and so it is strong.

When children come along in a marriage, the focus in the couple shifts from attention on each other to a partnership where the main focus of attention is now on the children. The different personality types will respond in different ways to such a shift. What do you imagine will happen to a person who is self-focused, who wants his or her spouse to constantly shower attention? And what will happen to a person who is always happy to give and does not need to be the center of attention? Here is an example of different responses leading to different results.

You can consider many other scenarios – financial hardship, ill-health, problems with children, death in the family, worries at work, etc. How will each personality type respond when such struggles come in a marriage?

There always needs to be at least one giver for a marriage to work, and if there are two it can thrive. So in today's world, where narcissism and self-interest are encouraged and promoted by advertising and the media, it is not surprising that so many marriages fail or exist in suffering rather than joy. When we are intent on blaming and criticizing the other person for problems, rather than looking to ourselves and accepting difficulties, nothing can move forward. We have become a 'me' rather than a 'we' culture.

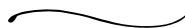
But this is exactly why the institution of marriage brings so much hope for the future. Let's go back to our elderly couple in Princeton. Did they start out married life in this *sattvik* state together? Not necessarily. Life together, over the years, brings about a shared evolution. The rough edges are made smooth, acceptance blossoms over time, and both learn from each other how to be in harmony and stillness. That is, as long as they are both willing to stay together through all the ups and downs of married life.



Marriage and family life teach us to become more and more giving, if we are willing to commit to the journey. There is a traditional French tale, *Beauty and the Beast*, in which the Beast starts out very *tamasic*, imprisons the beautiful Belle and locks her away as a prize. But over time the kindness, love and acceptance of Belle transforms him into a handsome, gentle prince. We love these folk tales for the very reason that they kindle something in our unconscious mind that we know is possible.

This is the possibility marriage brings to all of us - the opportunity to grow, refine ourselves and learn to love. Through marriage we can evolve into that *sattvik* state of communion I saw that day in the elderly couple by the river - so subtle, gentle and full of naturalness. I hope that more of us will have the opportunity to experience such a state.

That is why in 21<sup>st</sup> century Yoga, family life is venerated far more than the celibate life of a monk. It is through the love and sacrifice, the struggles and acceptance, and the willingness to grow that marriage offers that we refine ourselves enough to realize our fullest potential as human beings.



## About Kamlesh D. Patel:

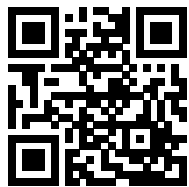


Known to many as Daaji, Kamlesh D. Patel is the fourth guide in the Heartfulness tradition of meditation. Embracing the many roles of a modern-day teacher, he has that rare capacity to dive deep into the center of his existence in the heart, while simultaneously having a scientific approach to original research in the field of meditation, spirituality and human evolution. He is a prolific speaker and writer, and you can read his latest writings at [www.daaji.org](http://www.daaji.org).

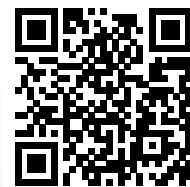
## About Heartfulness:

Heartfulness is an approach to the Raja Yoga system of meditation called Sahaj Marg, founded at the turn of the 20th century and formalized into an organization in 1945. More than seventy years later, Heartfulness has been adopted globally by groups across civil society, government departments, schools and colleges and corporates.

In 130 countries, supported by 7,000 certified volunteer trainers, over a million people are practising Heartfulness. This number continues to grow globally through hundreds of Heartfulness Centres worldwide.



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