

Marriage: The Eternal Principle

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Marriage, 'Abdu'l-Bahá tells us, is an everlasting and unchanging principle of social living.¹ This paper will be concerned with the role marriage plays in man's ultimate purpose, which is to know and to worship God. It will also begin an exploration into the guidance found in the Bahá'í writings as to the practical implications of marriage. A brief look at modern secular answers to marital problems will then be examined to determine how much they are in accord with a Bahá'í procedure for marriage conciliation and to what extent secular therapists' techniques may be relevant to Bahá'í marriage.

Marriage and the Nature of Man

Marriage is necessary in any attempt to realize the purpose of man for at least three reasons: 1) marriage joins together two separate entities and thus demonstrates the creative, unifying principle of the universe, called God or the Absolute Beauty; 2) marriage, by joining two people of the same purpose, provides a greater depth of resources and thereby a greater ability to realize that purpose--a life in active contemplation of the Absolute Beauty or God; and 3) marriage establishes a creative and healthy environment whereby mankind can propagate and ensure its immortality and spiritual evolution.

1) Marriage demonstrates the principle of unity by joining two separate individual entities. The two people become more than forces acting in sympathy, they merge into a common force acting toward a single goal: that of life in contemplation of Absolute Beauty, life dedicated to the knowledge and worship of God.

Marriage is at the very heart of man's social identity. It establishes the basis for the other forms of social cohesiveness from the basic family unity, to the community, to the nation state, to the world community. It is this demonstration of the principle of unity by marriage that establishes the foundation for greater social endeavours as 'Abdu'l-Bahá states:

From the pairing of even the smallest particles in the world of being are the grace and bounty of God made manifest; and the higher the degree, the more momentous is the union ... and above all other unions is that between human beings, Thus is the primal oneness made to appear.²

The primal oneness, the realization of God's kingdom on earth (the unification of mankind), is dependent upon the bonding together of individuals in a common social order. The basic (and strongest) bond within a viable social organization would have to be that bond between men and women, the two most different and complementary aspects of man.

A most interesting aspect of this principle of oneness in the universe is that of the male/female principle which recurs throughout mythology. The mythologies of the great civilizations all have symbolic representations of the uniting of the male and female aspects of man, i.e. androgynous man. This unification of man and woman is, further, the occasion for extraordinary powers and supernatural insights. Androgynous man is bestowed with powers which transcend the limits imposed by the human form. The recurrent idea is that man's potential is fulfilled when his basic duality is overcome.

The Great Original of the Chinese chronicles, the holy woman T'ai Yuan, is the embodiment of both the masculine Yang and the female Yin.³ Eros and Hermaphrodite in Greek mythology are also both androgynous.⁴ And Tiresias, the blind seer, encountered in the Oedipus and other myths, is both male and female and has the ability to foresee the future. The Hindu god Shiva appears "united in a single body with Shakti, his spouse he the right side, she the left side—in the manifestation known as Ardhanarisha, "The Half-Woman Lord."⁵

The biblical story of Adam and Eve portrays this reality of opposites in the physical world. The first man was androgynous and "removal of the feminine form into another form symbolized the beginning of the fall from perfection into duality."⁶ Since this original duality, man has struggled in the world of multiplicity, aspiring toward an understanding or realization of oneness to transcend the finite reality of paired opposites and approach the infinity of Absolute Knowledge.

The Bahá'í expression of this concept is explained by Taherzadeh:

All created things, whether tangible or intangible, come into being as a result of the intercourse between two elements which assume the functions of male and female. This pattern is followed throughout the whole of creation....⁷

Marriage is a practical demonstration of this principle and is also the ideal situation through which man can overcome his limiting particularity and thereby approach a knowledge of and service to God. Seen in this light, then, marriage is of essential importance to man's attainment of Absolute Knowledge (the knowledge of God).

2) Marriage, by joining two people of the same purpose, provides a greater depth of resources and thereby a greater ability to realize that purpose a life in active contemplation of the Absolute Beauty or God. Once the two entities are so intimately united in the pursuit of this ideal of unity, the individual powers and talents of each are synergistically combined to produce a power of perception that far exceeds the mere addition of the separately identified beings. Receiving mutual assistance and complementary support, the married couple is now more capable than any other collection of individuals can ever hope to be. While this is partly due to the synergistic nature of human cognition, it is also due to another more mysterious factor.

Living according to the Creative Principle of the universe, man is party to and the beneficiary of the positive and creative workings in the universe, even "though (he) may, at first, remain unaware of its effect, yet the virtue of the grace vouchsafed unto him must needs sooner or later exercise its influence upon his soul."⁸ Man, a creative or enthalpic force (as opposed to an entropic or chaotic force), can receive assistance from the other creative forces and entities because of their common nature and sympathetic agreement. There is an intrinsic accord between creative entities upon which man can rely as he pursues life in contemplation of the Absolute Beauty. Intrinsic agreement between entropic forces is, on the other hand, impossible since such an accord is contrary to their particularizing tendencies. So when individuals demonstrate the Creative Principle of pairs by marrying, they are liable to incur the often mysterious, unforeseen, but not random or coincidental, benefits of sympathetic agreement with other creative forces.

One characteristic of this principle is the experience of joy—the joy that is imparted through participating in the ideal of love, marriage, which defines man's purpose. It is joy that heightens all man's abilities, "In times of joy our strength is more vital, our intellect keener, and our understanding less clouded."⁹ And while joy is encountered outside marriage, it is within this institution that joy—spiritual and lasting joy—is most accessible to mortal men.

Joy is one measure of a successful marriage. If a marriage is successful in enabling the partners to understand further the Absolute Beauty, the most basic desire in man—lasting and uplifting joy—will be the effect on the partners. Further, the effects of the attainment of this joy are not limited to the two participants; joy has a positive and creative effect on the social environment as a whole.

Perhaps more important, is the effect of this joyous environment on the progeny of the marriage. It is only in this environment of joy that man can effectively propagate both his spiritual and physical being.

3) The third function of marriage is the promotion of immortality. Plato states:

The object which they (men) have in view is birth in beauty, whether in body or soul...this is procreation which must be in beauty and not deformity; and this procreation is the union of man and woman, and is a divine thing; for conception and generation are an immortal principle in the mortal creature.¹⁰

That is, while marriage is at one time the dramatization of man's love of Beauty or love of God, it is also the only way for him to procreate himself spiritually. It is within marriage that the requisite beauty can be demonstrated and the joy established to ensure spiritual procreation.

Implicit in this statement is the belief that procreation outside marriage ensures only man's physical immortality and does not guarantee spiritual continuance. For without a healthy family environment, the child learns an appreciation of creativity and unity (otherwise demonstrated by the mother and father) only by chance observation in other social groupings which are necessarily more superficial than marriage.

The family ensures an environment where otherwise neglected emotional and spiritual faculties can be exercised. Without objects for and reflectors of love, the emotional growth of the child will be hindered, even perverted. More importantly, without a concrete demonstration of the principle of pairs (evidence of the primal oneness of the Absolute Beauty) the child is not guaranteed to inherit the evolving spiritual awareness of civilized man.

Marriage serves a crucial function in translating or channeling the characteristics and potentials of mankind into the concrete terms of the individual. Marriage is the concrete link between the particular individual and the reality of social existence which defines his identity and to which he owes his mental, spiritual and emotional abilities.

In the Bahá'í Faith marriage is seen as an institution. Marriage is: a formal social organization which is essential for the advancement of civilization. Marriage is prescribed for the same reasons as suggested in the Plato's *Symposium*: it allows the new race of men to develop in an atmosphere infused with the inspiration of God; it allows spiritual procreation.

In *The Seven Valleys*¹¹ Bahá'u'lláh describes the role of the individual in the spiritual continuum that is civilization. The father is the summation of man's achievements that have preceded him from eternity to his instant (his particular existence). The son is the point or instant which begins a reality which endures to eternity. So any individual, being both a father and a son, sees his purpose in transferring or translating the spiritual progress which has gone before him to those who will follow him. This is the individual's responsibility to the advancement of civilization; he is the link between the past and the future, the accomplished and the potential. It is the individual's duty to provide the physical material for that linkage and to ensure his link is conducive to the advancement of civilization.

Marriage, then, is the practical result of man's spiritual thirst for unity or love of God—a love that is the cohesive force of the universe.¹² Marriage dramatizes the principle of unity, the prerequisite to attaining knowledge of the Absolute Beauty or God. Marriage enables men to go beyond the limits of their particular individuality and experience the realization of the principle of oneness. Marriage also enables the creation of the environment that facilitates both the spiritual and physical procreation of man.

The Practice of Marriage

To view marriage as a vehicle for immortality, as an institution of such great potential and occasion for joy would also be to view divorce as unthinkable. If marriage is a means to overcome man's mortal bounds, it would seem paradoxical that it could be forsaken, because of temporary mortal incongruencies. This is in essence what can be gleaned from the Bahá'í writings about divorce.

In newly released documents discussed in a letter from the Universal House of Justice, the Bahá'í position on divorce is clearly stated:

Divorce should be avoided most strictly by the believers, and only in rare and urgent circumstances be resorted to. Modern society is criminally lax as to the sacred nature of marriage and the believers (Bahá'ís) must combat this trend assiduously...¹³

The Bahá'í Teachings...consider (divorce) a reprehensible act which should be resorted to only in exceptional circumstances and when grave issues are involved, transcending such...considerations as physical attraction and sexual compatibility and harmony....¹⁴

As Bahá'u'lláh was so very much against divorce (even though He permitted it) and considered marriage a most sacred responsibility, believers should do everything in their power to preserve the marriage they have contracted, and to make of them exemplary unions, governed by the noblest motives....¹⁵

The Bahá'ís must, through rigid adherence to the Bahá'í laws and teachings, combat these corrosive forces which are so rapidly destroying home life and the beauty of family relationships, and tearing down the moral structure of society....¹⁶

Marriage in contemporary society often fails to fulfill fundamental goals and purposes and its very validity is now being questioned. The current trend toward legal support of common law marriage means that social legitimacy is no longer restricted to married couples but is extended to encompass any two roommates. It is not our purpose to show that this is the case or even to discuss the social ramifications of the degradation of marriage. What is now intended is an examination of the solutions to troubled marriages put forward by secular social scientists. Some predominant therapies will be examined both for practical instruction and, more important, for insights into the underlying societal concepts or assumptions about marriage.

The social scientist is necessarily restricted by the modern notion of empiricism. To be empirical, one must rely upon observable and measurable evidence, and this reliance denies the empirical approach the scope to deal with the intangible and mystical dimensions of reality. With such a limitation in mind the social scientist can serve to enlighten us about the observable and tangible aspects of a relationship between individuals or groups of individuals. The social scientist can study, rearrange and manipulate for optimal efficiency, the interpersonal relationship through therapies which concentrate on communication or emotional honesty or sexual fulfillment. These aspects of

interpersonal relationships and, indeed, the interpersonal relationship as a whole, are but the physical and mortal manifestations of marriage. Such therapies can help a troubled marriage but only temporarily and in a temporal way, for they, by definition, deal with the aspects of man's mortal essence which are transitory and mutable.

The best that can be expected with communication or emotional awareness therapy is the improvement of a necessarily imperfect and transitory medium. Speech, for example, can never fully encompass the complexities of a thought or a feeling; it can do so only imperfectly and incompletely and with the hope that the received words will catalyze or somehow inspire the original idea in the listener's mind. Speech, and likewise marriage, work because of an innate, a priori sympathy or commonality between the partners or actors. This commonality is human nature, it is the human spirit, undefinable and intangible yet real and vital. It is this common spiritual identity of all men which provides the common ground upon which marriage, like speech, is able to work or even to exist.

Marriage therapy, to be of real or permanent value, must go beyond the imperfection of the physical relationship and instead develop a focus on a more permanent and perfectible basis--the spiritual realities of the marriage relationship. How this is done is logically simple but difficult in practice. Further elaboration of this principle will follow an examination of the therapies of the social scientist.

If marriage is so very important and if divorce is to be avoided, how then do people cope with the real problems encountered in the pursuit of the ideal of marriage? Although prescribed solutions to marriage problems are almost as numerous and varied as the social scientists who propose them, today's schools of therapy have a common theoretical basis. The basis of most modern marriage counseling lies in the improvement of communication between partners, that is, improvement in understanding the motives, needs and wants in a marriage situation. D.D. Jackson, Jay Haley and Virginia Satir are three leading marriage/family therapists who will be considered representative of the modern state of marriage counseling; and comments and criticisms of one will often apply to the others.

Jackson has set the trend, approaching marriage counseling from what might be called a holistic point of view. He looks at the problems of a marriage as originating from the structure of the family unit and the operation of what he terms family homeostasis.¹⁷ The family unit is seen as an information feedback cycle which reacts to changes in its members in a way that maintains itself at its accustomed level of functioning. In this sense one cannot accurately analyze or treat a patient outside of or separate from his family because the problem is probably derived and maintained in his family interactions. Furthermore, to treat an individual alone would evoke the homeostatic mechanism which would either negatively compensate for any improvement in the patient or destroy the balance and hence the existence of his family and marriage.

For Jackson, the family unit is all important because it determines the character and behaviour of the individuals. Marriage therapy, he advocates, should include the entire family, for to treat a marriage without consideration of the children is to deal with only half the character of the marriage partners. Jackson approaches a psychological problem, both of an individual and a couple, as "psychosis of association"¹⁸ and attempts to treat the problem by strengthening or clearing the communications between family members. The object is to allow the real person to emerge from an imperfect habitual interaction. But this assumes that the real persons, once revealed, will be naturally compatible. This is not necessarily an incorrect assumption, but Jackson's concentration on communication alone means that there is no way to ensure that there is this natural compatibility, nor can Jackson treat or deal with this more basic interaction, the interaction of souls. Without the focus on the basic spiritual compatibility of a couple, marriage becomes a confusing myriad of interacting motives since the consideration is then simply physical and self-centered, transient and ephemeral.

Jackson has placed himself in a position of being overwhelmed by the complexity of the issue. It is in an excited pioneering tone that Jackson, somewhat reminiscent of Bacon in *The New Organon*, defines the task of modern family/marriage therapists as that of gathering data from observation and experimentation so as eventually to develop a method or system out of the apparent madness of interpersonal relationships in the family unit. Jackson confronts the question boldly and with integrity, but he has created this confusion himself by omitting the spiritual perspective which allows a higher order to be superimposed upon the affairs of men.

Haley emphasizes the social context of marriage, viewing the marriage as an "interacting system" of interpersonal reflexes.¹⁹ Haley's position is an elaboration of Jackson's concept of family homeostasis. Haley hints at the longer range social purpose of marriage but then concludes that each marital situation is unique.²⁰ While this uniqueness may be true of the physical particulars of any marriage, it cannot be true of their essential spiritual nature. Marriages are common in that they involve an important principle of human nature, unity. To study marriage is to study human nature, and to look at marriage without an agreed upon or consistent concept of human nature is to look at marriage meaninglessly and randomly, without any real prospect for gaining knowledge about marriage.

Haley's conclusion that each marriage is unique can be seen as a logical necessity of the inductive approach which he, as a "scientist," employs. Haley seems to have adopted a positivist approach to analyzing marriage, that is, to view marriage as an entity which is the sum of its parts. If marriage were defined solely by its composite

elements, the marriage partners, it would indeed have to be unique in each instance. This, though, is to make marriage a mortal and temporary thing which must cease to be significant upon the demise of the two composite parts. Marriage could hardly then be the institution that it is in the Bahá'í dispensation, because it would be individual, specific and temporary.

Marriage can be described as synergistic in that it is more than the sum of its constituent members. Marriage has characteristics and an existence unto itself. It is physically realized by way of the two participant individuals who, in abiding by the principles of marriage, partake of the bounties of marriage, and who certainly do not determine the essence and principles of marriage by their physical characteristics. It is, rather, that physical characteristics are determined, and enhanced, by marriage. And this is the reality behind the institutionalization of marriage—marriage is a manifestation of man's true essence because it, like other institutions, is a vehicle whereby men can coordinate themselves to achieve their physical potential and spiritual purpose.

Satir, like Jackson and Haley, takes an approach to marriage therapy which would immediately and superficially endear her to a Bahá'í. Her main point is that problems within marriage must be solved by therapy directed towards the family as a whole rather than the individuals therein, thus recognizing the importance of the social relationship and social environment of marriage. Implicit in Satir's (as well as Jackson's) philosophy is an acknowledgment of man's common spiritual identity. For every individual, the real wants and needs, as opposed to what he perceives as his wants and interests are ultimately the same for all individuals as they are all part of a common causality, that is, created by God. Difference of opinion and conflicts of interest between individuals result, not from a difference in nature, but from an inability to make known or to communicate adequately this information about interests. If the language of human intercourse could be perfected, the individual would realize the commonality of his real interests with others. For example, one can only imperfectly make known to another one's emotional attitude. Unless by chance the recipient of the emotional expression interprets it correctly, there is a potential; for misunderstanding which can be very difficult to correct. The ideal would be to perfect the information cycle or, failing a perfection of language, the goal would be to involve a number of "feedback loops" or responses which could verify and confirm the accurate communication of the message. This is what Satir is attempting in her therapy.

With this end in mind, Satir's therapy has, for example, involved the use of group games where the members of a family or families can involve themselves in mock situations that are close enough to reality that significant learning can occur. Yet these games are at the same time abstract enough that the sublimated responses of participants can be observed and not repressed by everyday, routinized behaviours. The idea is to create a situation where the usual entropic tendencies in the information cycle are reduced by an awareness of what kind of behaviour is having a deleterious effect on the information cycle involved in the relationship.

Satir's primary three games are called: the simulated family, the family system game and the communications game.²¹ While these games are well conceived and useful on one level, it is not necessary to delve too far into the particulars of the games to perceive their common weakness. The games all involve and concentrate on the individual's responses to others. The communication game centres on the development of understanding between family members. The simulation family game involves becoming acquainted with other members' roles. The systems game, initially the most promising, ends up measuring success by the amount of honest self-expression. These games, and Satir's theory, in general, concentrate on the individual to individual relationship for data while ignoring the individual's identification with the group, in this case the family and the institution of marriage. The identification with a common identity, i.e. the family or marriage, is the common ground which unifies two entities that may otherwise (without a common predicament) have many differences and no reason to remain unified.

It is important that communication and understanding between individuals be facilitated and, in this respect, such therapies as Satir's have value. But it is the identification of the individual with the institution of marriage that subordinates all the individual's physically based relationships into a position where harmony is possible. That is, if the individual remains aware of the purpose of marriage and its potential, not only for himself but for all mankind present and future, and recognizes what participation in marriage signifies (the principle of unity, the principle of pairs), then any problem incurred in the physical realm will be more easily solved, giving way to the overriding deeper harmony of souls.

This concept of identifying with the institution means that the marriage relationship is a triangular or trilateral one, one which can only partially be analyzed or described by studying the participants themselves. The third factor in the relationship is God and the character of the institution of marriage which exists separate from the participating individuals. Two people joining together in marriage are synergistically endowed with insight and capacity—this synergistic endowment being bestowed by the character of the institution of marriage and the sympathetic agreement with other ordered and constructive things.

Conceiving of and practicing marriage with a view to its transcendent reality allows the individuals in a marriage relationship to deal with problems which would otherwise be insurmountable. In other words, the problems incurred

in the particular and finite world will themselves be particular and finite. A problem of communication or any other physical disharmony will persist only as long as man perceives himself as a physical reality. It is in light of the spiritual harmony between men, as demonstrated by the social institution, that the harmony of particulars between individuals can occur. And it is this universal condition of marriage which Jackson, Haley and Satir have not identified. Consequently they see marriage as a temporary thing whose purpose is to provide happiness for the individual.

All of the therapists mentioned have stated, either explicitly or implicitly, that marriage in itself is not permanent. This is in contrast to what 'Abdu'l-Bahá states: "know that the command of marriage is eternal. It will never be changed or altered."²² The difference is due to the importance placed on the physical and impermanent aspects of marriage by secular therapists. Communication skills, intellectual prowess, sexual passion and emotional fervour are all ephemeral things; and to base a marriage on them would result in a temporary relationship. 'Abdu'l-Bahá places marriage in the realm of the eternal, because the principle upon which Bahá'í marriage is based, i.e. spiritual unity, is a principle that transcends the physical world. In fact the spiritual oneness striven for in a Bahá'í marriage often involves concepts that are contradictory and paradoxical to the physical world; the androgynous man and Absolute Beauty, for example, are absurd from a solely physical perspective. It is impossible, therefore, to achieve the unity dictated by the Absolute Beauty by searching for physical similarities (that is, emotional, intellectual and sexual similarities) among men—men and snowflakes share the distinction of each being unique. Any unity between men must be approached by first identifying the common spiritual reality and then, working back, to put the myriad of physical variables into a complementary order.

The physical reality of man is not meaningful in itself but must be seen as a tool in a greater pursuit, a pursuit that goes beyond the limits of the tangible universe. Corporeal existence must be ultimately inferior to that aspect of man which can perceive order and unities in disparate things. This is not to say, however, that man is to be ascetic. Without the use and substance of the physical body, man would be without that all-important tool with which he can create and experience order and continuity. Man would be unable to prove the existence of that which he strives toward (God) or even to develop any appreciation of this Absolute Beauty if he were without the experimental feedback system of an experiential, and hence finite, entity.

Plato defines this principle in the Symposium when he describes Socrates. Socrates represents for Plato the ideal human struggling in life in contemplation of Beauty. Socrates is utterly indifferent to pleasure, hardship and danger. We are not to suppose that he is not tempted, but that sets aside a seducer's charm as being of less value than the moral and intellectual beauty after which he is striving and in this he shows himself the noblest kind of lover, has passed beyond the law of physical beauty though he still aware of its attractions.²³

This is the ideal of love where love is ultimately spiritual. It also takes into account man's physical reality. This is stressed repeatedly in the Bahá'í writings: the physical desires of man are not to be suppressed or denied, nor, are they to be allowed to interfere with man's spiritual progress.

The practical remedy for a troubled marriage proposed by the Bahá'í Faith may appear radical to the modern practitioners of marriage counseling but is obvious from Socrates' viewpoint. Bahá'ís are advised to do exactly what Socrates did to overcome his problems pertaining to the physical aspect of man. When problems arise in a marriage, the couple is to look toward their common aspiration, the noble life contemplation of the Absolute Beauty, and in doing so to realize the common mortal reality. And it is from this similarity, the sameness view of the ideal and their ultimate harmony of purpose, that the couple can work back and repair any of the temporal differences that have arisen due to the finiteness of their physical perceptions and abilities.

The love which exists between the hearts of believers is prompted by the ideal of the unity of spirits. This love attained through the knowledge of God, so that men see the Divine love reflected in the heart.²⁴

Further the command is to:

Love the creatures for the sake of God not themselves. You will never become angry or impatient if you love them for the sake of God. Humanity is not perfect. There are imperfections in every human being and you will always become unhappy if you look toward people themselves.²⁵

Awareness that all people have a common station in relation to God facilitates first the deepest spiritual bonding and second, the harmonization of the physical realities of the couple which will resume in effective and honest communication, complementary intellectual endeavours and a balanced and productive sexual relationship. Such result is beyond the ken of the social scientist who would call the relationship impossibly idealistic. It is beyond him

only because he attacking the problems from the wrong perspective—trying to arrange the infinity of finite particulars of a relationship into a harmonium coexistence instead of starting from the point of harmony and unity.

The laws of Bahá'í marriage serve to enable this physical harmony the everyday physical world. Foremost and basic to the rest of the laws or guidelines, is consultation. The Bahá'í version of consultation involves a process which best resolves the aberrations of the particular self or ego. Consultation can be described as a forging of a balance between man's varying abilities of intellect, emotion and intuition by instilling an awareness of the all important search for truth or knowledge of the absolute. Realizing the limitations of these three faculties towards this goal, a consulter is encouraged to abandon any attachment he might have to a particular idea, since it is of the self and hence limited. The abandoning of attachment is an acknowledgment of the individual's incompleteness or imperfection. It is a more complete and perfectible expression of ideal man that is created when individuals lend their individual strengths to a common cause or pursuit, because their collective nature is more universal.

Consultation is the all-pervasive law governing Bahá'í social relationships. As a tool for overcoming the barriers contracted with human temporality, Bahá'í consultation in effect does what the marriage counsellors attempt and partially succeed in doing. Consultation encompasses Satir's therapy, for example, and more, because it involves the acknowledgment of the group entity of man, or, in other words, the commonness of all men as beings created by and subordinate to a Creative Principle or God.

The use of consultation in a Bahá'í marriage is evident in the year of waiting in Bahá'í divorce proceedings. The year of waiting is required so that any barriers to consultation that may have developed can be discovered and put into perspective. It is a time of "cooling off" where perhaps strong emotions or intellectual pride is given a chance to resume its subordinate role and once again harmonize with the overriding essential unity of spiritual purpose.

During this time the partners are urged to consult with the Local Spiritual Assembly in attempting reconciliation. These consultations serve further to objectify the problem in light of the greater purpose of social unity. In general, all efforts to reconcile the estranged partners involve the concept of consultation—the means by which the temporal aspects of the marriage can be put back into place and realigned to sympathize with that more basic and essential unity of spiritual aspirations.

It is a subtle point that the administrative procedures of marriage counselling in the Bahá'í Faith are not ends in themselves. Like other Bahá'í institutions, the administrative proceedings of marriage (including all aspects of the procedure: consent of parents, Local Spiritual Assembly approval as well as counselling procedures) are only the means that allow a realization of the ideal of marriage. Marriage is an end in itself, existing apart from the administrative procedures which serve to facilitate the physical viability of marriage. The administrative procedure would ideally instill an awareness or appreciation of the station and purpose of marriage as described and implied in the Bahá'í writings.

This then is the Bahá'í approach to a troubled marriage: to recognize the common reality of all men and their common aspiration towards the noble life and to see how that ideal, God, is reflected in each aspirant so that the easily discernible differences become unimportant, even invisible.

The trouble modern society has with marriage is due to the general lack of awareness of the spiritual and metaphysical possibilities of marriage. The idea of participating in a unifying principle of oneness—a principle of pairs—or even the idea that there is more than mere physical propagation in marriage seems incomprehensible to a society which relies primarily upon countable, measurable information to interpret the universe. This approach is doomed to wallow in a confused infinity of particulars and to attack the problem from the wrong perspective. Concentrating solely on the particular and mortal aspects of human existence furthers the process of particularization and duality, and man is denied the comprehensive outlook required to perceive the basic unity in existence.

Marriage is a means whereby mankind can gain the inspiration to fashion a life in contemplation of Absolute Beauty. Marriage partakes of that Beauty, the oneness of the universe, by demonstrating the principle of pairs and by enabling the mortal creature to become immortal through spiritual and physical propagation. Marriage, then, is an immortal principle in a society of mortals.

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