

Chastity and Marriage

The motive for writing this, is a recognition that the nature of sexuality, human life-relationships and beneficial conduct are not something that any young person can predict; for human love and sexuality defies all one might ever guess by calculation; its knowledge comes only with the practical experience of age: and even those endowed with age, are usually trapped in whatever course they set sail upon when they were young. Therefore these things are important to get right, effecting your whole life and every moment of your well-being.

A life-relationship is a plane that will take you to the brightest heaven or into the darkest abyss - a wise person will determine first the right plane to board!

Healthy Communities

The success or breakdown of relationships has slight additional impact on today's disfunctional societies where everyone feels isolated amidst an ocean of people. We live in a rather material age where everyone is wandering disembodied from their neighbours and local community like gnats floating lost within the vacuum of space, living more comfortably than kings yet lacking the happiness that comes from interaction, purpose and service in one's local community. Likewise, the soul-partnerships we go on to form are disembodied from the surrounding society, with the result that people battle to live a life and struggle exhaustedly to bring up their children.

In a functioning society however, every individual is integrated into a closely-knit community of friends, deeply understanding, interacting and serving one another, expressing and exploring their deepest feelings and needs; a closely-knit community is a celestial experience. It can be the street of a city, a village, or a secluded commune - the important thing is the functioning spiritual dynamic of service and love within it, and to surrounding communities.

In order to understand the implications on society of the relationships we form, let us consider a secluded commune of 70 people, intimately working together, and holding a deep, loving abiding friendship for each other. Daily they work in concert, serve each other, look out for each other, eat together, and laugh, sing and tell stories around the bonfire at night. When two of their members join together as one in a life-relationship, this is a

tremendous boost to the community dynamic, and in its turn the community dynamic invigorates and lifts up the relationship in a healthy way, sharing much of the burden of life, such as children and interactive activities. Conversely, with each relationship that breaks apart like a mirror into two, those two people will no longer be on delightful terms with each other, they will be visibly distant and aloof, often inimicable to each other, wreaking havoc and disrupting the harmony of such a free-flowing and pure community spirit, causing it to resemble a body whose fingers or limbs resent cooperating. Therefore, a fine community dynamic has an absolute interest that every life-relationship works out, and in turn individuals and their life-relationships have an interest in a healthy community dynamic. Whilst we have taken this example from a commune, the same points apply to any situation where people truly know and feel for their neighbours, whether it be a village, a street in a city, or even a disparate city community of like-minded people (though in the case of the latter, it is best of all if one's bonds of friendships are formed with one's geographic neighbours).

How then can a healthy community best achieve this goal of supporting life-relationships, and those relationships benefit the creativity and stability of the community?

Marriage

The concept of marriage in relation to the community, has little meaning in a disfunctional society where people's hearts are isolated from one another. In this material age we sign a slip of paper, perhaps get a few financial perks and legal benefits, and unsign the relationship when it inevitably breaks down.

In a functioning society, however, the civic recognition of marriage is a commitment by society - your neighbours, who you will be deeply serving and interacting with - to support your marriage every day in every way possible, both materially and spiritually, putting away any misgivings any individuals might have; and if the relationship comes to any rocky moments, to pull out all the stops to be of assistance to help it work. Only after all the assistance the community can muster has been given and tried should it ever come to the point where efforts must be given up, it is then officially recognised that the two people are going to go their separate ways and all your friends in the community can know they need no longer strive to be of assistance.

Because every healthy life-relationship promotes the concord of society, and the breakdown of every life-relationship wreaks havoc on the harmony and dynamic of society, and every relationship needs its umbilical connection to a healthy society, it is vital that all life-relationships are endorsed with society, an endorsement which we call marriage, and which in the future will carry an entirely different feel from that of today, with no one in their right mind wanting to enter a life-relationship without enlisting the wisdom and support of their community to ensure it works most perfectly and blends most fully into the harmony of the society.

In life, there are obviously three forms of marriage:

Physical - The physical marriage is commenced the moment a person has sex with someone, nature having made it such, that on having sex, people become inseparably attracted toward each other and can only be separated with great pain and anguish. So powerful is this physical marriage, you can by its means bring together the most incompatible people. If people do then tear themselves apart and go their separate ways, it will be in a state of great turmoil and pain; that is the physical divorce. It is therefore essential that people engage upon physical marriage (sex) only after such a relationship is fully confirmed to be likely to work out, through the deepening and consultation of the individuals concerned, and the wise experience and recommendations of those around.

Social - In the opening section, it was discovered how the healthy well-being of society and individual's life-relationships rely upon each other, how once made harmonious, the dynamic of society is severed whenever a relationship is broken, and vice versa; this mutual interest is recognised by the Social Marriage, whereby any physical marriage must be endorsed by society, so that society can support and nurture the relationship, particularly if it should every run into difficulties. If after great assistance from all around, the relationship is still deemed to be unrecoverable, then both the physical marriage and social marriage come to an end, thus officially permitting the community to discontinue their endeavours to bolster that relationship. It should be obvious on reflection that the social marriage must *precede* the physical marriage (sex), and the social divorce must come *after* the physical divorce - this is why chastity is summed up as "no sex before marriage". This in simple terms is a way of saying, "Physical and Social Marriage occur at the same time, but because any endorsement in life comes prior to the thing endorsed, the Social

Marriage should precede the Physical, even though it be by as little as the blink of an eye."

In connection with this, is the need for parental consent. Your family is the one source of honest opinion about your relationship, and they will tell you what they think. Parental consent allows the parents to force you to reflect upon your upcoming marriage where you yourself may be inclined to just dive in blindly, and they also represent through their endorsement the harmonising of two families, which must be at least superficially compatible just as you must be compatible with your partner, in a functioning society they will be living very close by, and will all take a very keen interest in your welfare and the welfare of your children. If your parents are on your side, they will even sell their house to help you out of difficulties; whilst if your parents are contrary to the steps you are taking, they will wash their hands of any problems you may have, and may make life awkward. Therefore it is both prudent and very beneficial to have proper consent of your parents to the marriage. The act of obtaining consent not only forces people to iron out any difficulties they have with their future extended families, but encourages people not to get into those difficulties in the first place, knowing that parental consent will be later required.

Spiritual Marriage and Divorce - For marriage to work in as smooth a way as possible, there needs to be a spiritual dimension at work, otherwise the partners would come to blows and be knocked out by trifles. Without spirituality, the marriage will become like a dead body, and though it begin with a great conflagration off fire, without spirituality it is likely to fade into dying embers. This spiritual marriage, the entanglement of the destiny of two souls, is such that two spiritualised people will become consorts together throughout eternity and the infinite expanse of the uncountable worlds of God.

It should be clear and evident that these marriages (and divorces) should occur at the same time. At present people say, "Let's try out a physical marriage (sex) and only marry if it works out; by this means we will avoid being tied in and divorce;" but this meaningless, as the very act of sex results immediately in them becoming inextricably tied in, followed by the subsequent pangs of divorce when they separate from a broken relationship. Far better to embark upon a relationship wisely and enlist the community's loving support - that is, to conjoin with every Physical Marriage the Social and the Spiritual Marriage.

Not-marrying someone Socially is also even in this present age a sign that a person is hesitant of commitment, either through fear of responsibility, doubt about a relationship lasting, or to keep one's options open. In either case, this is a pretty good reason for a person not entangling themselves in a Physical Marriage with them.

Chastity

In order to gain the greatest benefits from life-relationships and to avoid the pitfalls, one must practise chastity, which really means having patience until the right person appears, whom society also endorses, since in a healthy society, the perfection of society, relationships and individuals are all interwoven.

At its simplest, Chastity means having sex only with someone one is Socially Married to; but since there is a slippery slope that leads to people having sex, Chastity can more effectively be said to be "to reside before the start of that slippery slope", which means, for most people, not engaging in substantial physical intimacies, such as jumping into bed together, and getting deeply into kissing and so forth, as they are a very quick slippery slope to becoming entangled before the future of such a relationship has been realistically considered.

At another level, because even smaller physical intimacies with someone of the other sex invariably clouds a person's ability to judge their suitability of character as a long-term partner, it can be said that chastity also involves not engaging in the smaller physical intimacies until each others' characters are fully known and revealed to each other.

The above relates to Chastity of conduct. For the purest, there is the chastity of the heart, which involves keeping one's inner eye chaste, one's longings and one's motives pure and free from the feelings that will tend a person toward unchaste conduct. But as people are human, the important thing is to ensure chaste conduct, whilst working on the chaste heart at a manageable rate through reflection, prayer and deepening. One of the main fortresses of taking the right decision for the long-term whenever the easier alternative is a short-term strategy or indulgence, is the act of Fasting, which is about practicing exercising and strengthening one's will over one's tendencies, so that lesser matters become sacrificed to achieve greater. In relation to this, sex and indulgence is not the most important aspect of marriage; rather, the nurturing of each others' spiritual qualities and nearness to God. This is obvious when you consider that your

loving relationship ought continue undimmed if your partner ends up in a wheelchair, and when you both grow into old age together.

Some other matters regarding Chastity, are that it is important to get one's life-relationship right first time, wherever possible. It takes people many years to get over a broken relationship, and each broken relationship creates a tear in a person's expectations of relationships working and their trust of their partner.

In this respect it is vital to form many close (non-sexual) relationships in life, so that you naturally also develop an understanding and discernment of the qualities to be most sought in a partner.

There is also the beautiful notion of being true to your future life-partner before you have met them, by reserving yourself for them alone as if you were already with them.

Education has a big role to play in matters of relationships. As an adult, half of one's life is about relationships, and the other half is work - and even that work is mostly about relationships. So you'd expect that education should be mostly about relationships - but at present this incomprehensibly is completely ignored and replaced with learning facts you hardly understand and will never make use of, leaving youth to grow up untrained in their character and social skills, and uninformed of the right choices and the reasons for them.

The media, as a form of unstructured education, is also of tremendous significance. Current trends are for the media to encourage people to be indulgent and focus wholly on the short-term material side of things, and this will cause any bird soaring freely above the clouds to over-feed and, with its wings weighed-down and unable to fly, be forced back to the earth. The role of the media should instead be encouraging the setting up of the right group habits and values, through showing the right examples and making them seem within reach.

In the Bahá'í Faith, Chastity involves only being married to one person, for clearly having several partners divides one's concentration of attention and focus, and in practise leads to inequality and resentments.

Children

Clearly one of the most obvious fruits of marriage, is children. Just as life seemed so complete on your own until you met your partner, so marriage seems so complete until you have a child. The transformation children can bring, is tremendous.

We are all learning spiritual qualities, and putting them into practice to a certain degree, but when we are married we exercise our spiritual qualities to a far greater degree; and on having children, the fullness of all one's spiritual qualities are brought to shine upon that child.

In current society, women tend to prefer marriage to enforce commitment from a partner, as they are the ones that usually end up bringing up the baby. The role of marriage in safeguarding children is very important, although in current society it can often be viewed as the only reason, thus clouding the many other spiritual and social aspects of marriage of inestimable value.

Private and Public

As a Bahá'í, whatever you do as an individual to follow guidance is between you and God, except when it crosses over to effecting others, in which case the processes of consultation are required to resolve the matter. Of course even your private character cannot fail to have public effect on others, but we are talking about substantial or obvious public effects.

Thus for an unmarried couple to be publically living together, however platonically, will be sending out the wrong message to those around, and will need to be resolved through consultation.

Or again if two people are snogging in public, which should be a private and intimate matter, this will again need to be resolved through consultation.

In the case of severe disruption of the community, bringing the Faith into disrepute, or flagrant disregard for the processes and conclusions of consultation, the Bahá'í penalty - after consultation has failed - is that of the removal of administrative privileges : you cannot vote or be voted for, and you cannot attend Feasts, which are at the centre of community harmony; administrative privileges can be restored as soon as the issue is reversed and the right mood is set.

Miscellaneous

Can a Bahá'í Marry an Atheist?

It is easy to see that a Bahá'í can marry a member of another religion, if it does not involve the Bahá'í compromising their personal principles and conscience; however, given the marriage vow "We All Verily Will Abide by the Will of God", then even though the term "God" can be stretched to include more Buddhist senses of the divine mystery

in the universe, it nevertheless seems hard for a Bahá'í to marry an atheist. I guess the answer to this would be that for a marriage to work, it must be more than just physical, or it will likely grind down to a painful end. The two people must have some communion of core values, otherwise the communion is only of surface values. For a Bahá'í (and any religious person) the core value is belief in the divine mystery at the heart of reality, which is called God, and this is shared with other religious people but not with atheists. The marriage vow recognises this as the core value and therefore an essential requirement for any Bahá'í to marry, without which the partner will have only surface values in common, which will become more apparent as the marriage progresses. Conceivably the atheist might wish to make the vow for the marriage to go ahead, and this would at least mean be an indicator that though an atheist they respect their partner's spiritual leanings; yet I tend to suspect that since spirituality is such a core essential to have in common, that the Bahá'u'lláh has required the verse at the very least as a reality check, but fundamentally so that the people are making a commitment not merely to a physical marriage, and not merely a social marriage - but to a spiritual marriage that is intended to stand firm through the chances, challenges and changes in this material world and in all the uncountable worlds of God after this mortal existence.

How can a person becoming a Bahá'í, become Chaste when they are already in a long-term sexual relationship?

I guess the couple in the relationship need to assess their relationship, and recognise that they are already "married" because they have entangled themselves physically and emotionally. They therefore need either to recognise that they are fully committed to each other - in which case marry - or to recognise that they are not fully committed to each other - in which case agree to become chaste until they have sorted out clearly what they want to be doing.

Why are Christian Priests Celibate?

This dates from 1139 AD. For the first dozen or so centuries of the Church's existence, not only priests, but also bishops and popes married and raised families. Priestly celibacy probably arose from the fact that a Priest without a wife and family to support has far more time and energy to commit to the community they serve, and without children they couldn't pass on to their children the assets that

come with their job, whilst their abstinence would serve as an individual practice of restraint and purity, that would also serve as an example of restraint and sacrifice to others.

Nevertheless, with the intention that all people should be taking an active role in their community, both spiritually and practically, and the guidance of the community being in the form of an assembly elected for their spiritual qualities, such needs, whatever their original merit may have been, are certainly not required in a Bahá'í context.

What about Homosexuality?

This topic is considered elsewhere. Fundamentally, nature has a certain design target, and achieves this through a slightly scatter-gun effect; thus we all end up with imperfect tendencies, and we have a choice whether to turn them into conduct or not, and if we turn them into conduct, we have a choice of whether to do so in private or public. Inasmuch as the question of homosexuality is a question regarding the healthiness of the act and whether it meets nature's design-target, it is not a moral matter but one for doctors and scientists; inasmuch as it tends to emphasise a material indulgence, it is a spiritual matter concerning the individual, and inasmuch as engaging in it publically or ostentatiously it disrupts society, it is a social matter to be resolved through social organs via the dynamic of consultation. It doesn't mean homosexuals are good or bad people, but they have to recognise that, like their heterosexual counterparts, to live in alignment with the natural, social and spiritual worlds requires a certain exercise of restraint of short-term tendencies to achieve the best long-term results.

Chastity and the mind/body conflict

It is true that striving to uphold chaste conduct whilst being insufficiently chaste at heart will create a certain mind/body conflict; nevertheless, this conflict is less than the conflict of giving in and getting a relationship wrong; and to a certain extent it is very character-building to practice a certain restraint, as you will often come to need it in a relationship. It is hoped however that this period of beneficial restraint would become shortened as collectively people increase in their spiritual qualities in life, and as individuals are educated to be more discerning of the right relationships.

What do other religions say?

The broad need for chastity is recognised in all the main religions.

I have problems with Chastity, what can I do?

All these things will be of help, to which you can add your own:-

- ◆ Surrounding yourself with friends who set a positive example.
- ◆ Prayers for assistance
- ◆ Reflection and deepening on the Writings with regard to such topics as are mentioned in this document.

Is parental consent always required?

No - you don't need consent from adoptive parents (though it may be nice to do so, and you do need to have tried to find your natural parents, law permitting), and criminally abusive parents lose their right of parenthood in regards to requiring consent from them.

Is sex sinful?

No, it is quite natural, like eating, although like eating it can also be over-indulged. Many people regard it as a gift to celebrate; it is just a practical reality that the sexual impulse needs to be channeled in a healthy way so that it leads to constructive rather than destructive influences in people's relationships. Generally the more constructive a thing is, the more destructive it can be when used inappropriately. Since sex in the right context has immense constructive qualities, it also follows that in the inappropriate contexts, it can be a cause of immense destruction.

Sexual energies

Some people assert that there is a distinct sexual energy, whilst others assert there is only one energy, which is displayed in many ways, of which sexuality is just one way; and that this energy can be diverted to other creative uses when not employed sexually.

I think people are free to believe whatever they like on such questions, so long as its discussion is pursued amicably in the spirit of harmonious fellowship, and a real attempt is made to unravel the truth rather than the common tendency of people to believe all manner of speculations without testing their reality.

Minimum Age

The age at which you can get married in the Bahá'í Faith is 16, although this is a minimum age and for most it is later.

In a well-functioning society, people are far more mature and share responsibilities, and it is probably good to have children early, as you are more flexible and able to adapt to the needs of your children, as well as having more creative energy. Doctors also observe that having earlier children is much better medically for both the woman and the child, whereas today there is a tendency to have children quite late.

Arranged Marriages

The Bahá'í Faith prohibits arranged marriages, insomuch as the children are both free to select their own partner and also must consent freely to any marriage. On the other hand, the Bahá'í Faith requires the consent of parents, which is in recognition that a marriage is also marrying two families together as one in the social fabric and that the parents can have a wise input upon the process of a person choosing their life-partner.

It should be pointed out, as a matter of interest, that arranged marriages do at least as well as the western romantic marriages of love, for the simple reason that those going into arranged marriages have a more realistic expectation, and they grow to love each other, whereas western marriages of love have unrealistic expectations, and therefore have a tendency to grow disappointed when these expectations are not met, and to have overlooked critical elements of what makes a marriage work.

If a person has several wives

If someone enters the Bahá'í Faith already married to several people and the law of the land permits it, then they are expected to keep those partners, but they cannot take a further partner until any such time as they have no partners.

Amendments

Please send me ideas for improving this document!