

Sexual Orientation

Whilst the majority of humans find their natural desires are enkindled by someone of the opposite sex, a small proportion of people orientate themselves toward someone of the same sex.

Humans exhibit many biological differences from the norm, and some are very surprising. Exploring and relating to these differences is generally challenging and concerning only to those who live with them - either the individuals themselves, their relatives and friends, or those professionally addressing the matter - and everyone else with an interest in the area generally engages the existence of such differences with a detached curiosity. For example, one may consider the question of colour-blindness, or synaesthesia, both of which relate to sight, an exceptionally important part of our being. No one rises up in protests, rallies, horror or dire fulmination against colour-blind people, nor against pretty much any other condition, or consenting activity. So there is something very remarkable about sexual divergence, that seems to raise up very strong emotions and opinions in people, even when they have no real-life connection with the matter, or even any knowledge of it.

From society's point perspective, homosexuality does represent a substantial divergence from the sexual norm. There are quite a few intertwined issues that arise in exploring this subject, and most people have a lack clarity in this area that results in either a total abstention of any view on the matter of homosexuality, or an exaggerated and aggressive response against it. This polarisation of response is quite harmful to harmony and understanding, for in a healthy, balanced society, people need to walk together in their understanding, vision and response, in both this and every other engaging question.

Human Standards

Human beings have an innate tendency to socialise and benefit from healthy interactions with one another, and to create villages, towns and cities that maximise the power of this common journey together; and so to steer a healthy life, we have to adhere to two types of standard, one fixed, and the other capable of change. The fixed requirements tend to be stipulated by nature, such as a need for daily sleep, whilst changeable standards tend to be stipulated by the decisions and customs of society, such as stopping and moving for colours of traffic lights, and

dresses not being worn by men. For a religious outlook, nature also involves our continued spiritual journey as a conscious soul beyond the death of the body, and this puts a high premium on further standards such as the development of conceptual insight, resolve and detachment. As individuals living within the framework of these standards, we have to entune ourselves to meet them all, and where these standards are dissonant or contradictory, society cannot tune itself into them and becomes dissonant, both with regard to essential standards and also common standards that form a framework of working together. As an obvious example, nature dictates we eat healthy food, whilst society heavily promotes unhealthy food, and such dissonances along with many others, all pitch together to create a dissonant society.

Within these general standards, we also have individual standards; but despite a modern tendency to encourage otherwise, we are not isolated individuals expressing and indulging ourselves as much as we please within a framework of no common values, connection or impact on nature and society. Even the most apparently independent person is heavily dependent on and affected by past and present society around, without which he or she would live like a wild animal scratching in the ground, entirely subject to the chances of nature.

And so, in exploring homosexuality, we are exploring it in relation to these fixed and changeable standards, and it will also be found that many of the issues relating to homosexuality are equally found as issues for heterosexuality.

A Brief History of Homosexuality

Historically, the practise of homosexuality has tended to take the form of an unconsenting rape of vulnerable male youth, particularly those in a position of social submission to a male adult. This has generally been either out of aggressive indulgence of sexual energy, or as part of an unquestioned cultural initiation ceremony, such as pubescent boys being shown into adulthood. Many of the men so doing were married, and since no woman was involved, it was often seen as complementing rather than violating marriage.

This is of course no different from the violation and rape in the heterosexual world, and requires the

greatest prevention and censure. Bahá'u'lláh speaks of it in the Aqdas:

We shrink, for very shame, from treating of the subject of boys. Fear ye the Merciful, O peoples of the world! Commit not that which is forbidden you in Our Holy Tablet, and be not of those who rove distractedly in the wilderness of their desires. (Aqdas, 107)

Surprisingly, in the past, a dislike of homosexuality was often for an entirely different reason from today; for whereas today the stigma would fall against the perpetrator, in the past the stigma might fall against victim, since the perpetrator was felt to be in the correct position of male dominance, whilst the male victim was in the shameful effeminate position of female subservience unworthy of a man.

More recently, the trend in westernised societies has been toward consenting homosexuality. Whilst there are many matters in common between consenting and unconsenting homosexuality, there is no doubt that modern consenting homosexuality is in no way the same as unconsenting rape, and interaction with it must be through voluntary dialogue and guidance, and an appropriate transformation of society ethos and understanding through education, media and internalised social perspective. As with any other issue, grey areas arise because hasty or ill-informed consent lies between unconsenting and consenting behaviour. These issues apply just as strongly to heterosexuality, where the modern trend of people becoming sexually involved at a young age or in haste without due consideration of character, is very much the way of the age.

Nature's Design

Fundamentally, from the point of view of nature's design, the primary purpose of the sexual act is reproduction, and its secondary and related purpose is an emotional bonding that prevents aggressive responses to the act of reproduction.

Nature has a slightly off-centre approach in achieving its design targets, for as well as aiming for established targets, it also has to experiment with new ones to meet changing environments; so its fundamental workings tend to lead to current designs being achieved with a smattering of slightly varying combinations that are not part of its design target, and which can be understood as either experiments, mistakes, inconsequential variety, or side-effects - such as cystic fibrosis (mistake), different eye colour (variety), digestion of a different food (experiment), or a decreased efficacy in one area which is tolerated

because of an increase in another (side-effect; for example periods indispose a woman, but it is tolerated due to its greater purpose). Although these many things are the outcome of the general design feature of flexibility, none of the specifics that result are in any way a design target.

Examining the topic in hand, the showing of affection by a person to another of the same sex is generally desirable. Yet however much general affection may be in nature's target, the homosexual act itself is clearly not part of nature's target, being entirely a misdirected and sterile enaction of the heterosexual process of reproduction upon another's organ of defecation. It may of course be rightly said that many misdirected uses of design are called play and leisure, which from nature's design is a fun rehearsal of skills hoped to be employed in more functional activities; not only is homosexuality not any playful rehearsal for later use (except perhaps in bisexuals), but it is quite antagonistic to a human's material design, and harmful to basic health, as any doctor will state.

Well of course life is full of things harmful to well-being, and the question is how do (and should) people handle behaviour that's antagonistic to human design? Generally speaking, we divide things into whether an activity effects others (unconsenting) or not (consenting), its severity, and whether the person wants to change.

Matters affecting only individuals are generally responded to impersonally through the guidance of education and laws regulating the problem's spread, and when a person desires it, through guidance personally given; on the other hand, matters impacting others require a more strenuous response, actively addressing individuals concerned and, if unresolved or to clear up public consequences, addressing it publically.

In the example of acts restricted to affecting consenting individuals, a whole spectrum can be seen. Taking unhealthy food and drink is permitted (even advertised) but is impersonally guided against; cutting your wrists will create a serious response; and an attempt to throw yourself off a building an even more forceful response; in this spectrum you have to consider where consenting homosexuality lies. Likewise, matters affecting others who are not consenting, whilst taken more seriously, also have a wide range of responses, from the toleration of noisy music, to the downright prevention of murder.

In reality, we are of course not isolated beings, but live interconnected with a wider society, and there is no real distinction between what affects just the individual and what affects others, for everything affects everyone else to some degree. Overeating may seem an individual problem, but if you overeat, people are sad for you, you cannot support your children, partner and elderly parents as capably, and your visible example influences others to take the same route.

Society's Design

Just as Nature has design targets, so does Society. In fact, Society is a direct product of Nature's design, which is why we do it so spontaneously, and therefore in a sense you might also consider Society's targets as a changeable form of Nature's targets.

As has been addressed earlier, the designs of nature, society and spirituality should all be compatible and complementary, and to the degree that there is dissonance of their targets, turbulence and unhappiness will result. A balanced society would not spend money promoting smoking, getting drunk and eating unhealthy foods, and would instead innately use the media and television for beneficial ends. In practice, we live in a society quite antagonistic to the needs of nature, and this conflict of designs creates a turbulent response to activities not in accordance with nature - do you follow society's design and encourage it, or follow nature's design and discourage it? nowhere is this more topical than in the issue of energy use and climate change. A society aligned with nature would be sensitive to nature's needs, and respond immediately and fully to its sighs and signs. This very same turbulence is also seen very much in the question of homosexuality, which elicits discouragement from some because it is antagonistic to nature's design, and encouragement from others because society's present design standards centre around individualism and self-indulgence. Society has one portion putting its foot on the accelerator, and the other putting on the brakes, and the result is damaging disharmony in society.

Nevertheless, whether they are good or ill ones, society has its targets, and will always always do, because without a common framework of language there could be no dialogue of interaction from one person to another and the expression of spiritual values, and in accepting society's targets you have a choice of working with them, or working against them. The language of society is just like the language of speech; the sounds we use for words are arbitrary, but

we have all agreed upon them so that we can communicate feelings and intents. If an individual were to say that since the sounds of speech are arbitrarily chosen, they are going to use a swear word to mean orange, and anything else they happen to feel, then all verbal communication and spiritual rapport would break down; and similarly if an individual were to say that since many of the rules of society are arbitrary, they are going to go around the streets naked with trousers on their head and drive along the wrong side of the road, then societal communication would break down. We all have a choice of upholding social norms of respectability, or violating them and appearing undignified, of affronting public norms or acting in private. For instance, having sex with a corpse or an animal will always be undignified, however much the corpse doesn't mind or the animal may enjoy it. In this respect, homosexuality is to a large extent against society's current design and its public expression is especially a violation of its dignity, and if society is to stay aligned and bound with nature's design, it always will be, for although you can try to push society to change its stance on just about anything over decades or centuries, nature's changes work in the order of millions and hundreds of millions of years and are effectively fixed.

Glorification of Homosexuality

Whilst it is clear that the homosexual act and tendency is not part of the streamlined order of things, there should be no stigma against a person having a homosexual disposition, and even its private act by those so resolved must be lived with, for there are a great many things out of order in the world that must be accommodated, and many far worse, with an unhealthy predilection for judging others one of them.

But what should never be tolerated is the glorification and promotion of homosexuality. Whilst we don't judge a person who is colour-blind, we do not glorify and promote colour-blindness; whilst we don't judge a person who is obese, we should not glorify and promote obeseness. Obeseness should not be taught in education as an equal to being fit and healthy, nor blindness be chosen as an equal with sight; and so nor is homosexuality to be promoted as an equal to heterosexuality, for to do any of these things is to pervert and misrepresent nature's inherent intent, and a sign of an ill society at odds with its natural basis.

Response to Homosexuality

The main task required in responding to homosexuality, should be to dampen the extremes and emotions on both ends of the debate. Homosexuals should not be value-judged, condemned, humiliated or put down as inferiors, for we are all humans equal before God engaging the unique challenges we find ourselves in; yet neither should there be any acceptance of the promotion or encouragement of homosexuality. The homosexual disposition needs to be explored and addressed in a matter-of-fact way, just like any other condition. Some may discover they can change, others may not, and such change must be explored in the most humane, loving and accepting way with those who want to explore change, and those who do not, that is up to them.

Some Particular Topics

Same-Sex Marriages

Should homosexual partnerships be called marriages? This is really a matter of language and how we use it. Plates and saucers are both crockery, and very similar, but we call them entirely different names, because we use language to communicate purposefully; a donkey and a mule are both animals and extremely similar, but one is sterile and one is reproductive; even when a donkey has no children, it is still a donkey not a mule, because the design and purpose is even more important than the realisation of that purpose. In the same light, marriage is a word expressing in purpose a package of mutual growth and raising a family, and although same-sex relations are partnerships, they are in purpose entirely different from heterosexual relations, in which a family is raised over many years and the human race perpetuated through intricate interactions and relationships of those children with others. Human language has to reflect this. Whilst you can have a same sex partnership, you cannot have a same-sex marriage. The wish to see homosexual partnerships as marriages so that there is no distinction between homosexual and heterosexual partnerships is very much motivated by the extremely individualistic approach of modern society that visualises marriage as two people disembodied from extended relations and surrounding society, and which overglorifies material sex over societal connections and bonds; instead, society and families are intricately interwoven, and viewed from a communal whole, the difference between family and sterility is as different

as a tree with its roots permeating into the ground, and a tree that has no roots.

Sexual Desires

We live in a world that has an over-emphasis on the sexual impulse, so that you would almost imagine a person has no life outside of sexual expression. This is partly true, in that society has lost many of the qualities that give a person personal fulfilment, particularly through the loss of community and family structures and involvement. This over-emphasis on the sexual impulse makes it hard for people to meet the challenges that are sometimes faced. A person through mischance of birth, accident to their body, social imbalance, old age, separation, bereavement, or love of someone already married, may through no fault of their own be faced with having no sexual partner; they have to live in the way that they can and come to terms with this, and the less emphasis they place on sex the easier this will be as they find other avenues of expression and fulfilment. Homosexuality is simply another example of this, whether as a condition of birth or acquired.

Orientation and Conduct

There is a great difference between orientation and conduct. Orientation is a disposition, whilst conduct is carrying it out. We all have orientations to do all sorts of things, but maturity is what prevents it turning into conduct.

Spiritual Perspective

From the spiritual perspective, we are asked to be not slaves, but masters. Everything we do, should be through willing choice because it is felt to be beneficial, not some enslaved compulsion in which we have no freedom or choice. The over-promotion of sexuality deprives people of this freedom and enchains them as the slaves of the body and desire, and both homosexuals and heterosexuals are equally in danger from this. At death the body will no longer be there, and a strong, free and un-self-orientated Will, will be found to be of the utmost benefit.