

Marriage and Sexuality

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The issue of marriage is something that would take a long time to discuss, and what I am going to do tonight is to share with you some general thoughts about marriage and about sexuality, and then we will have a discussion, and hopefully it will be fruitful. The first process that takes place that eventually ends in marriage is a process that God has put in all of creation. The whole creation has been created in the forms of two entities that become attracted to each other. In the world of humanity, of course, it is man and woman. And men and women are created in this way that they will naturally become attracted to each other. It is a natural process. And through this attraction and through this coming together, a higher level of unity and collectivity takes place. So the first thing that happens, as far as marriage is concerned, is that a man and a lady meet each other, and they become attracted to each other, and they say they have fallen in love with each other. They like things about each other: the way the other person looks, the way the other person talks and all the kinds of things that happen at the beginning of a relationship. But the essence and core of it is that they are attracted to each other. As a matter of fact, many people think that love means a very strong attraction.

Another condition takes place at that time: mainly, that people not only get attracted to each other, but they discover that they satisfy some of their needs through this relationship. So it becomes a mutual attraction and a mutual gratification. For example, we all have certain needs. We may be lonely; when another person comes into our lives it gratifies some of these feelings of loneliness that we have. We may be afraid, but being with somebody else decreases the fear. We want somebody to tell us that we are marvellous and magnificent and great, and somebody appears and tells us all of those things. So, what happens is that we have all kinds of emotional needs, and some of them at least are gratified through the relationship with this other individual. So, when two people come together as a result of their attraction to each other (in other words, they find each other beautiful and handsome), and they are also able to gratify some of their needs, people then say that they are in love. And in the beginning that love is blind to everything else. All they see is that the other person is beautiful and the other person gratifies those needs.

At this stage the counsels of other people about what they should do and not do, usually don't have all that much effect. That is the reason why it is called romantic love, blind love. And it is romantic because most of the issues that these two individuals feel about each other basically are make-believe in the sense that they see in the beloved what they want to see. They see in the other person all the things that they wish and hope and aspire to be there. There's nothing wrong with that, but eventually it can become a problem when the two people realize have fallen in love from a position of ignorance of each other. They have searched and finally have come upon this

individual whom they are attracted to, who gratifies their needs, and who reciprocates their feelings. It becomes a very, very strong bond. And because they do not know each other, therefore what they think about each other are usually their own thoughts and their own hopes.

The two people usually begin at this stage to think about getting married. And not infrequently, they do get married. Gradually, something begins to happen. They begin discover that this magnificent person, with all the magnificent qualities that he or she has, also has some habits and quirks that they don't like. And they become really surprised that the other person is not perfect. This imperfection begins to show itself in all kinds of ways: the way they wash their hands, or chew their food, or brush their teeth, or whatever they do is just somehow wanting, and they begin to discover that the other person is not exactly how they imagined. Because, after all, they didn't know each other. They imagined that the other person was like this or like that. We all have an image of what an ideal husband or an ideal wife would be. And when we see someone, become attracted to them and receive gratification of our needs, then we decide that that person is exactly all of those things that we have wanted. Later on we are surprised that the other person is not what we thought.

Something else also happens in this process: Not only does the attraction between the two begin to wane as they get used to each other, and they find they are not all that excited about one another any longer, but their needs also begin to change. For example, at the beginning of relationships in many cultures, the circumstances are such that women are in need of somebody to protect them, and men are in need of somebody to adore them. So they start a business wherein the man says: "I'll take care of you. You are a doll, so I'll put you up there, I'll dust you and so forth, so long as you adore me and do everything I want you to do for me." The woman has to be the slave and adore the magnificent husband, while the husband is the powerful one who goes out into the dangerous world and provides protection. That is the old style of marriages, though it still exists very much in this world. The newer approach is for the wife to say, "Now I want you to serve me and adore me", while the husband still says, "No, I want you to serve me and adore me." They begin arguing back and forth, "you're not adoring me enough", or "you're not serving me enough", and a power struggle begins to take place. All of those fantastic hopes and aspirations and dreams that were at the beginning of the relationship and marriage, one by one begin to change or shatter. The people involved begin to ask questions: What am I doing in this relationship? What is in it for me? What does she want? What does he want? Why is he this way? Why is she this way? But more importantly, another process takes place. And this next process is that the wife and the husband begin to be absorbed more and more with their own respective areas of involvement than with each other.

At the beginning of the marriage, the husband and the wife thought of each other most of the time, even when they were at work or at home or wherever. But when that period comes to an end, they begin to think more and more of themselves. They begin to think of their jobs; if they have children, they

become preoccupied with the children--one parent more than the other, usually the mother more than the father. They become preoccupied with the home and the decoration of the home, or putting money aside and developing the business, etc. In short, they become much more preoccupied with their own selves. And in a way, they begin to feel more and more removed from each other. A sense of remorse begins to set in. A sense of loss begins to enter in. People begin to resent what is happening. They begin to wonder whether they have made the right decision or the wrong decision. They begin to wonder whether this is the way they want to be, and they begin to think of the nice romantic face, and they wish that they could have that back. Wouldn't it be nice if we had the romantic face back again? If the beginning has been bad, they won't wish it, but if the beginning has been alright, they want to go back.

It is during this phase, which is the second of the three stages marriage goes through, where there is usually the greatest danger of break-up, of involvements outside of the marriage, of enormous arguments and fights and disagreements, and of all kinds of struggles. I would say that about 80% of the marriages that go sour do so during this second phase of marriage. And when they allow it to happen, they end up starting a new relationship where they begin again at the romantic phase in which everything is again dandy and blind, and soon thereafter the process of the second phase begins, and they are facing in the same issues.

The truth is that there is no way that you can get out of this dynamic and this evolution of marriage. Why is that? Because marriage is not a contract, contrary to what people think. Marriage is not a contract. Marriage, as 'Abdu'l-Bahá defines it, is a union. Now, a union is a phenomenon that brings two living entities together, and creates a third entity that has a life of its own. Let me give an example: In the womb, before a sperm and an ovum come together, each has a life span of its own--in each case a total of only a few hours. But when they come together and create a fertilized egg--in other words, they have a union--then the life of a human individual begins. All of us are the result of that union. And, as you see, this union results in something new that is far greater and very different from either the sperm or the ovum. It is an entity in its own right; it has a life of its own; it is a reality of its own.

In this manner, when a marriage takes place, we, as 'Abdu'l-Bahá says, come together and create a condition of union. Which means we create a new entity, a new organism. This new organism is marriage. And this organism, this marriage, has to mature and grow up like any other organism. At one level it is like a child. At another level it is like an adolescent. At another level it is like an adult. Therefore, of the three entities of the wife, the husband, and the marriage, the one that is in most need of protection in the beginning is the marriage itself. In essence, marriage is the first baby of the couple, and the second baby is the first child. The first baby we give birth to is the marriage. And at the beginning, this marriage is very fragile. It needs attention and nourishment and care. It needs to be helped to grow, to

become strong. It then must go through the next phase, which is the phase of adolescence in which rebellion and arguments and power struggles often take place, like any teenager with the parents. And finally, it reaches the next stage, which is the stage of maturity. At this point a different kind of relationship takes place. But because people do not understand this phenomenon--the evolution or maturation of relationships--they expect that as soon as they get married, the newly-born marriage can take care of all of their needs. But this little baby marriage cannot do it, and it ends up collapsing under the stress and the pressure that is put on it.

So this is the first issue that we have to understand about marriage: that it is not a contract only. Marriage is a union, and it creates a new life, a new living being, a new living organism.

Because marriage is a union, it therefore has to have a special quality, a special characteristic. This characteristic is something that is missing in most marriages that I encounter, not only in the clinical setting, but in general. The majority of people do not have a notion of what the fundamental characteristic of a marriage should be, and this is primarily because they think of marriage simply as two individuals who love each other. And by "love each other", they mean that they are attracted to each other, that they smell good to one another, that there are "good vibes" between them, that they satisfy each other's needs, cry on each other's shoulders, laugh together, etc. They think that is love. Consequently, the fundamental characteristic that makes a union possible is not present. And what is that? That, of course, is unity. Most marriages do not create conditions of unity. And most marriages will not create conditions of unity because people do not understand what unity is all about. 'Abdu'l-Bahá says in one of His prayers about marriage, for example: "Glory be unto Thee, oh my God! Verily, this Thy servant and this Thy maidservant have gathered under the shadow of Thy mercy and are united through Thy favour and generosity." The first matter of marriage is unity. But what does unity mean? Well, unity does not mean that the husband and wife agree all of the time. Unity does not mean that they always think the same way. They may think the same way; they may not. Unity does not mean that they have the same appetites, or the same orientation, or the same sex drive, or the same levels of comfort and discomfort. Those are all the icing on the cake, so to speak. But these are not elements of unity.

The first and foremost, or the greatest, aspect of what creates unity is that the relationship is just. There has to be justice in a relationship for there to be unity. Conversely, marriage that is based on unity is a marriage in which justice takes place. What does it mean to have justice in marriage? Justice means that the husband and the wife have the same opportunities for development, for growth, and for becoming. To evolve, each must have the same opportunities. If we want to be able to create the condition of unity, we have to create conditions in the home in which the woman and the man both feel that they are being treated with justice. We each need somebody to encourage us. When there are things we need to change, perhaps things that we do not like

about ourselves, it makes such a difference for somebody to say, "My beloved, you are magnificent because of this and that and that". It gives us courage to act upon our process of transformation. The act of encouragement is an expression of justice in which you give courage to another human to change him or herself. To have the courage to change yourself, you need encouragement. When you need encouragement, it requires somebody else to encourage you. It takes courage to transcend oneself and focus on the good rather than the bad qualities of another person. It takes courage not to be hypocritical, but to really, honestly mean it. So we can see that to establish unity, you need justice. And in a just relationship, everybody has to evolve and grow. And in order to evolve and grow, you need encouragement. If a plant is to grow, it needs food. In marriage, the food for individual growth is encouragement.

Fostering the condition of justice is not all that easy; there is a prerequisite. The prerequisite for unity is justice. Bahá'u'lláh says that the purpose of justice is appearance of unity. But, what is the prerequisite for justice? The prerequisite for justice is the condition of equality. We need to create a marriage of equals, for that marriage to be just. Humanity has never had marriages of equals. Marriages up to this time have been marriages of people who are not equals. Women, by and large, have been viewed as lower or inferior to men. The history of humanity has been a history of the abuse of power by men. And this abuse of power has taken place at all levels, especially at the level of marriage. Men have to face this reality. It doesn't matter if they are of Persian, South American or North American origin, of black culture or white culture, Chinese or Japanese, or any other background. The fact remains that, throughout history, men and women have not related with each other from a position of equality. The fact remains that men continue to wield power, to abuse power, to try to control. And the fact remains that because of that, relationships are not equal. And if the relationship is not equal, the relationship is not going to be just. If the relationship is not just, the relationship is not going to be united. If the relationship is not united, a union has not taken place. And if a union has not taken place, there really isn't have a marriage to speak of.

How can the condition of equality be created? The first step is to become less self-centred and more directed toward the needs of the other person. People generally are self-centred. We live in a society that tells us: look after "number one", yourself. We live in a society that encourages individualism, that encourages self-centredness, selfishness, indulgence. We raise our children to be indulgent and selfish. We raise them to think of themselves, and themselves only. When we talk about love in a relationship, we are talking about conditions that begin with being less self-centred. This translates into the habit of equality, which translates into the practice of justice, which translates into the creation of unity, which allows two individuals to create a peaceful marriage. This is a process.

Prior to this time in history this process has not been possible. Marriages of

the past have varied but, by and large, have been characteristic of the adolescent and childhood stages of the development of humanity. Now is the time for the maturing of humanity. We are in the last stages of adolescence and, in the Dispensation of Bahá'u'lláh, the whole of humanity is going to move to the level of adulthood. Everything will change, including the love stories and love relationships themselves. For example, consider the traditional love story of Shirin and Farhad. Shirin is a Persian princess. She has all kinds of maids and servants. They keep her cool, they give her drinks, they powder her. All she needs to do is sit in her glorious beauty. Farhad is a stonecutter. He is a poor character, tall and lean. One day Farhad beholds the beauty of Shirin and falls in love. Way down. He falls so in love that he cannot think about anything but Shirin, cannot sleep except to dream of Shirin. So finally, all he can do is go to the great king and say, "Oh, great king, I have fallen in love with your daughter. I want to marry her. And the king, being great, says, "Of course, there is no problem. You want to marry Shirin. That's perfectly fine. All you have to do is move this mountain from here to there. Not very far, but nevertheless you have to move it." Farhad, being young and stupid, embarks upon cutting pieces from the mountain and moving it from here to there, and in fact he is still doing it. In the meantime, Shirin has been having the time of her life with all of her servants. This is a story of one-directional love. Shirin only wanted to receive. Farhad only wanted to give. This is a kind of childhood love story. It is an earlier development of the love relationship in which only one gives and only one receives. In the context of a parent and child, this is alright. However, in the context of a husband and wife, this will not last very long.

In the adolescent stage, loving takes the form of all or nothing. You love me, and you love me the most, and you don't love anybody else. And I love you, and I love you the most, and nobody else. Such were Romeo and Juliet. They looked at each other and thought, oh yeah, she's magnificent, he's beautiful, and so on. They fell in love and then they had to prove who loved who the most. Adolescents have to prove themselves: I love you the most; I give you more; you give more, etc. Back and forth they go, until, in the process, they become so extreme that the poor beggars die in the process! They kill themselves to prove that they love each other. Why? Because they are in a state of competition. You see, either you are in a state of receiving and giving, or you are in a state of competition.

The love of equals, on the other hand, is a different kind of love relationship. That story has to be written by the new generation of Bahá'ís. We do not yet have the love story of equals. The literature of the world does not depict the love stories of equal relationships. We have to write them. This is the first time in the history of humanity that God has said, "Love Me, that I may love thee. If thou lovest Me not, My love can in no wise reach thee." With that, God has said to humanity: grow up. This is the age of maturity. Put aside these old childhood ways, and adolescent ways of looking at love. In your relationship with God, you must love at the level of a mature being. It is an honour that God has bestowed

upon this generation. The young people of this generation, as well as the not-so-young people of this generation, have to begin to write love stories of equal relationships. How do you write it? By creating it. By living it

It is in this context that we can understand the sexual problems that exist in marriage today. Sex is one dimension of the attraction that takes place between men and women. It can be a very powerful force of attraction. Probably for some, or many, it is the most powerful source of attraction. If two individuals are attracted to each other, it may be in a number of ways: physical, sexual, ideological, emotional. The process of spiritual attraction is different from each of these. We'll talk a little bit about it later. Sex, of course, is a very essential dimension of the relationship, because it allows the continuation of the human race. And very importantly, it allows us, as Bahá'u'lláh said, to bring into this world those who would remember God, and would contribute to an ever-advancing civilization. So you see, sex has an outcome. Any union has to have results. The outcome of the union of sperm and ovum is the child that comes to this world. The union of the marriage is to bring a child to this world. Not only do you create unity between the husband and the wife, and the marriage comes to this world, but also through this marriage the family is created. So far, the attitude towards sex in different cultures, in different religions, have been basically attitudes commensurate to childhood or adolescence. People's understanding of sexuality is either mixed with a lot of ignorance, a lot of lack of knowledge about sex, a lot of make-believe, or a lot of shyness. People do not know what it is all about; they do not talk about it. For example, in Persian families, I would say, by and large, there is a total ignorance about sexuality. Nobody talks about it. The message young people are given is that this is a forbidden area to talk about. But people think about it. People feel it. So they end up going through it with closed eyes. In Christianity, the approach is that sex is bad, do not think about it. This is ridiculous. If I tell the people here in this room, "Please do not think about sex; think about anything else you want, but don't think about that, okay?" What do you think you would do? A few minutes ago, you were not thinking about sex, but now...you are! That is exactly what happens in many Christian and Persian families, or Moslem families, and so forth. We say to the young people, who are full of hormones and an excitement for sexuality: "Don't think about sex!" We tell them that what they have been hearing about is lies, and that they should simply go and take cold showers. Here is the kind of remedy we give to these young people. And if that does not work, then we try to frighten them. We tell them "If you have sex, you will get syphilis or, now, AIDS, or all kinds of things." We try to control people through the process of fear, or through trying to get them not to think about it. And the overall approach to this process is generally from a negative perspective. When none of these tactics work, we bring in the wrath of God. We say, "God has told you not to do that; therefore, you mustn't do it." But that does not work either. What it does is make people grow up frightened about sex, or ignorant about sex, or ashamed of sex, or angry about sex, or all of these together. That is what happens. Sexuality loses its

contact with sensuality, with beauty, with the gratification that goes with it, with any other dimension of human development that should really be fulfilling and magnificent.

Let me give you an example, a parallel, to see how this process works and what kind of problem it creates in our society. Sex is one of the biological appetites. Hunger is another biological appetite. Hunger is more important than sex, because if you do not get hungry and you do not eat, you die. If you do not get the craving for sex and you do not have sex, you do not die. So hunger is more important than sex. Food is more important than sex, in that sense. Now, there are many approaches to eating: Some people eat fast. Some eat slow. Some eat junk food. Some people eat gourmet food. Some people eat too much, and then they feel sick. Some eat too little, and feel hungry. Most people do not have the discipline necessary to create a healthy habit of eating. Some people share their food with each other, along with their germs and diseases and their colds and everything else they have. Some people steal other people's food. Just think what we do with food! They all have parallels with sex. That is the appetite. That is the way we go about it. Some people think that if they don't eat, they would lose total control. But we know, for example, that in a perfect life, there has to be discipline. There has to be a process. There is a time. You cannot give a steak to a two-month old baby. You just can't. It kills the infant if you feed it steak. Early sex damages the same way that the wrong food at the wrong time damages. The wrong dimension of sexuality at the wrong time damages. And sex is not only having intercourse: it is a gamut of things. To begin with, some aspects of it are perfectly fine and acceptable such as the growth that people show to each other through sex; the care that they show each other; the affection that they show each other; the friendships that people establish, and so forth. These are the milk and honey of every childhood. They are perfectly fine. Having intercourse is not only the end result, but that is the way society creates the image of sex, as though it is the ultimate. And that is why the majority of people, when they have intercourse, feel disappointed. Or it is either painful or unpleasant, or it is too short or too long, or too this or too that. The majority of people become disappointed because their approach to it is so undisciplined, so un-thoughtful, so not discussed, and left in the condition of ignorance. They simply approach it with a total lack of sophistication. This is what we have created.

Our children are growing up in a society that believes in instant gratification. Everything has to be instant. Coffee is instant, hamburgers are instant, sex is instant: everything in society has to be instant. The joy goes out of the process. The process of sexual relationships in human beings is the process of discovery: discovery of beauty in each other. That is one dimension of it. It is also the process of the discovery of self-control in oneself. Again, this is connected to food: You know those occasions when you allow yourself to sit around the table and eat slowly and taste everything that you eat? When you have the best gourmet dinner that you can, and cherish each minute? To discover the beauty of that, you have to be deliberate about it, you

have to be thoughtful about it, you have to be in the right mood for it, you have to be in the right state of unity for it. A condition of unity has to exist among the people with whom you eat. When it does, that becomes a memorable meal. Sexuality has to be approached in this way. It is very different when you eat that way, compared with when you go and pick up a take-out hamburger and eat it. The whole approach to sexuality has to be, for example, related to knowledge of sexuality. I want to use another analogy of food: I was reading in the Washington Post today that the American Government has decided to change the standards of a good diet for the American people. Bad news. They had been wrong all this time. What they had been telling you all these years about what a good diet is, is now proven to be a bad diet. And do you know what one dimension is of the bad diet? That you are eating too much of those things that you do not need, and too little of those things you do need! This is the same problem with the attitude toward sexuality in this society: we pay more attention to the final act of sexual intercourse rather than focussing on those elements that go into the sexual relationship.

A sexual relationship is a process of first discovering the beauty in the other person. It has to start with encouragement. It has to start with the quality of not thinking solely about yourself, but thinking about the other person. It has to start with being considerate of the other person. It has to start in the condition of creating an atmosphere of comfort and safety and ease with each other, and trust for one another. You have to unite all of these ingredients in order to make the process work. You can not just rush through it, because you want to discover beauty.

The second thing that you want is discipline, because the process of any human activity is only successful if combined with discipline. Let me elaborate on this because it is very important. Every human activity is successful if done from the position of enlightenment and knowledge about what you are doing, with positive feelings of love and encouragement, and with self-discipline and moderation. Every human activity requires these three characteristics. There is nothing in this life that we should not approach with knowledge and love and discipline. What is the ultimate act of a human being? Are we not created in the image of God? One of God's qualities, or attributes, is that He is the Creator. And He has created us in His own image. Therefore, we are also creators. We constantly create. We create civilizations. We create families. We create chairs. We create airplanes. We create those things we create, because we are created in the image of God. Now, the act of love in sexuality and marriage has to be creative. And in order for something to be creative, it has to be disciplined. Those people who paint, for example, or compose music, or dance, they understand. If they are going to be creative, one of the things they absolutely need is discipline. And once you create this discipline, you are free within its boundaries. And that is the relationship between men and women. For instance, Bahá'u'lláh teaches that before marriage the discipline, the boundary, for creativity is chastity. Within the boundary of chastity, a man and a woman can relate to each other like they never have done before. This is so because until this time in the history of humanity, men and

women have not been able known each other. Why? Because as soon as they got close to each other, they start thinking about sex. And they started thinking, how can I have him? Or her? Or how can I get away from him? Or her? That immediately applied from the start. And as soon as that happens, these two people are not going to get to know each other. They are not going to be really honest with each other. They are not going to trust each other. But when you know you are going to have a relationship that is disciplined by the standard of chastity, then you can get to know each other; you can be close to each other; you can be intimate in your thoughts; you can share your feelings; you can share your aspirations; you can share and say what you like and what you do not like, what you are afraid of and what you are not afraid of. And you get to know each other. It is in this process, then, that when you make a choice, you do it with open eyes, rather than with closed eyes.

The other discipline about sex in the context of the marriage is that you have to be totally and completely truthful to your partner, and not being involved in extra-marital affairs. What does this mean? Again, it means that you provide a framework for the relationship, and within that framework you have freedom. If you do not have freedom, the whole thing collapses.

So, there are two frameworks that Bahá'u'lláh gives in order to allow us to feel the freedom of creativity within the boundaries that are necessary to build healthy relationships. It is not a matter of punishment, or Bahá'u'lláh saying, "no, I don't want you to enjoy yourselves", or, "let's give you young people a bit of a rough time". That is not the issue. The issue is that God has to create conditions in which you can become most creative. Of all the things we create, the most important, the most magnificent, the most far-reaching, is your life. Every one of us creates our lives, and it is achieved through discipline. One of the disciplines is chastity or fidelity before marriage, as well as after marriage. Another is daily prayer. Another is fasting. Another is not backbiting. Another is service to humanity. Another the pursuit of knowledge and the arts. And so forth. These become the frameworks within which we create our personalities, our ways of life, who we are, what kind of marriages we have, what kind of families we have, what kind of societies we live in, what kind of civilizations we create. Then we become creators. Thank you very much.

(applause)

Questions and Answers

Question: When or how can we begin thinking of other people at an earlier age?

Answer: Well, let's look at the natural development of humanity. I think God has left a few examples for us, when we are ready for them. One is the biological example. Another is the psychological example. And another one is spiritual. For example, biologically, as we grow and approach puberty, it's very clear that we are able to not only look after our own physical needs, but

we can also assist other people, because youth at that age are at the height of their physical powers. Or even of intellectual capacities, and so forth.

Psychologically, it is that age when we start falling in love. What does falling in love mean? It means that you start thinking less of yourself and more of somebody else. You see, falling in love is one of the first steps of consciously and deliberately putting yourself second and putting another person ahead of you. And, of course, Bahá'u'lláh's injunction for young people at the age of puberty to begin to pray to God, and to obey all the personal laws, which includes the laws related to others-directedness, service to humanity, thinking of other people, and so forth. All of these indicate that we underestimate the capacity of young people to become less and less self-centered and more and more universal in their thinking.

We live in a culture that tends to keep people as children for too long. We baby our children, so to speak. We do not allow them to evolve and mature to the degree and level that they can. Look at the demands that Bahá'u'lláh puts on young people when they become 15. The parents don't put those demands on their children. Bahá'u'lláh says that when a person becomes 15, he/she is responsible before God for his or her conduct. They are responsible for what they do. It determines the nature of the eternal growth of that individual. No longer can that individual blame society or the parents or others for what they do. We as parents don't do that. We still continue to baby them, and so forth. Erickson and others have expanded the period of childhood too long. I think the Bahá'í community of the future will allow and help children to grow up and to become responsible much faster, and to become universal much faster. And then, the biological, the psychological and the spiritual coincide. Right now they don't. Now what we get is a number of young people who are 17, 18, 19, 20, 30, 50 years old that are biologically very active, are sexually full of all kinds of powers, but psychologically haven't grown up. They haven't been allowed to grow up to be responsible, to deal with these energies that are within them, and spiritually they have remained totally unaware. So, there is no harmony between the biological growth, the psychological growth, and the spiritual growth. Our responsibility as parents is to harmonize these things. By the age of 15, children really should be aware of the level of self-discipline, maturity, and understanding of these principles that is necessary, as well as the fact that God has not given these laws for the purpose of limiting, or making life difficult for them, but rather to allow them to become the full, complete human beings that they can become. You see? So we have to change our ways of raising children and doing this.

Question: You said that marriages have three stages: childhood, adolescence, and adulthood. Is it necessary to go through all these stages?

Answer: Usually when I hold workshops on marriage, which are two or five days long, I never tell the participants from the start that there is a third stage. Any time I tell them that, everybody says, we are there! (laughter from

audience) That's right. Everybody. It doesn't matter what happens, we are marvelous, we are in the third stage. So I usually don't mention it until the last, until they are convinced and realize where they actually are. Everybody and every living organism has to go through different stages. The intensity of it may be less or more, but we go through the process. The whole world of humanity goes through that process, marriages go through that process, institutions, companies, governments, individuals, etc., and we cannot escape it.

Comment: In a perfect world, both partners sacrifice for each other. But in the imperfect world that many of us live in now, one sacrifices and the other one doesn't even know that the other person is sacrificing! (laughter)

Answer: At least a few people here are in agreement (laughter). Yes. That's why Bahá'u'lláh has given us the gift of consultation. You see, there are two ways in which we become aware that something is going wrong. One is the painful way. One person sacrifices; the other person ignores it, and takes it and goes on and on, until the whole thing breaks loose. The action comes, the anger, the war, and the whole thing. And one looks stupid and says, hey, what did I miss? And the other person says, well, you missed a lot, and so forth. But it is too late. That's one way that happens, unfortunately, many, many times.

But we are trying to create a better world. We don't have it yet. Bahá'u'lláh has given the necessary tools for doing it, but we Bahá'ís don't believe it, by and large. So we don't use those tools. We don't have any aim to use them. We just say, oh, consultation, that belongs to the Assembly (chuckles). That doesn't have anything to do with us.... Until you open a book, and Bahá'u'lláh says in all affairs you should consult. Now then, if you truly believe in that, then you have to look at consultation and see why we have to consult.

Very briefly, the nature of human relationships, historically, has been of two kinds: One has been the authoritarian kind. Mainly, in which one person tries to get another's power, and in one way or another gets that power, and then controls the other person, and says, if you don't do it, you will be sorry. Historically, men, by and large, have done that more than women. And these people relate to other people from a position of control, and a position of warning, and a position of making the other person frightened; and they are judgmental, and are always checking to see that you are right here or are wrong there, and their love is conditional. I love you if you obey me, and don't love you if you don't obey me. And these people usually are not open to new ideas. And when new ideas come, they put it down, and say, ah, well, this is a liberal thought, or this is a French thought, or this is not our culture, or they find a way to put it down... So that's one way...and that has been the principal way until very recently, throughout the world. Most people behave like that: governments, people, husbands, wives, parents, and so on.

But about 30, 40, 50 years ago, we began to realize that it is not really all

that good. In North America people moved to another extreme. They said, no, we're not going to be determined by this power relationship. What we are going to do is to indulge each other. You give me satisfaction, and I'll give you satisfaction. And we are going to have pleasure together. The sixties was the height of that process: make love, not war. It was the replacement of power for pleasure. That was the situation. If it is good, do it. That was the motto, and it still continues.

When a person doesn't acknowledge the sacrifice of another person, he is wielding power, because one of the strongest ways that you can control somebody is to ignore what they do. It's very strong: Just ignore it. Perhaps you go on, since you cannot do anything. And this person acts very mild and smiles at you and says, "what's the matter, honey?", and so forth. Meanwhile, you don't know what's going on, that this person doesn't even see what you're trying to accomplish.

In this case, you have to create a new way of relating with each other, a way in which people acknowledge each other, and accept each other as equals. We need to create clear conditions of justice. Do you remember what I said? That if you want to have a marriage, you have to create unity, and in order to have unity, you have to have justice; if you want to have justice, you have to have equality; if you want to have equality, you have to prefer the other over yourself. They are basic necessities. Now, if you study consultation, you will see that kind of relationship. Just read the principles of consultation. You see, one by one, that it describes how people can do that so that they will attain unity.

Question: Could we use the marriages of the Central Figures of the Faith as models?

Answer: I would not think so. Because if they were meant to be taken as such, they would have told us that is the model. The reasons are many. First of all, the life of the Manifestation cannot be likened to the life of any human being. The Manifestation is of a totally different state or level of existence. He just comes in the temple of a human being. But what the Manifestation is and who the Manifestation is, is so far above what we are. There is no comparison, you see.

The only example in the Faith that we have to follow is the example of 'Abdu'l-Bahá. That's what we know. He is our Exemplar. But we know very little of His marriage. I think what has to happen is that we have to pick up the qualities of the life of 'Abdu'l-Bahá. And then apply these qualities to our families and marriages and situation. There are ample examples of how 'Abdu'l-Bahá dealt with men, with women, with children, in different settings, in different conditions: how He showed encouragement, how He showed justice, how He showed self-sacrifice, how He encouraged others to do it. All of the elements necessary for creating a healthy marriage. The example of the life of 'Abdu'l-Bahá must become the prototype upon which we establish all aspects of our relationships with the individual, within married

life, within institutions, assemblies, and so forth.

Question: Is there some practical advice that can be given to go through the second phase, which is such a difficult phase?

Answer: There is quite a lot of practical advice, but the occasion and the time would not allow me to go through the process. The reason why we have workshops that last a week is exactly because of that. Because there are many practical steps that people have to learn and to take, and so forth. However, there is one issue at the core of all practical advice that I should mention. Again, in our society, we very much like to have everything packaged and given to us. As a matter of fact, North American society is a society of packages (chuckles from audience). And we have become so good at packaging that we don't need to put anything in inside (laughter). We sell everything simply through packaging. In fact, this is true about every aspect of us, including us as human beings. For example, the leaders of our society are all packaged. And they are presented and become presidents and this and that, and so forth. There's nothing there when you open it (laughter). Or, for example, we ourselves, and the way we present ourselves in society, are packaged. And when people open up in the marriage, they discover, my God!, this wasn't what I thought I'd got (laughter). So this is a society of packages.

Yesterday, I was talking with a publisher about one of my books, and he said, I'm sorry to tell you that it doesn't matter what you write: it's the cover that counts (laughter). It's the cover that counts. So that's the ultimate in packaging.

Now because of this, we always want practical advice of how to go about solving problems, as though the advice given to this couple is applicable to that couple, or to that one, or to that one. Which, of course, is not the case because one of the things that God did was to create everything unique. Every being is unique. Everybody is different. Why are we unique? Because we have to be a reflection of the uniqueness and oneness of God. The marriages that we create are also unique. Therefore, the solutions that we have to arrive at must be unique also. The most practical advice, therefore, is to learn how to use your creative capacities to come up with answers that are right for your specific marriage. Even though your marriage is at the same stage as another marriage, your solution is going to be uniquely yours, and must be created by you, not by anybody else. So that's why even when we are in longer sessions, I don't give any formulas, or any checks, any gimmicks of how to go about doing that, because we all have to create it ourselves. It's more difficult, but it's more lasting, you see. Otherwise, it becomes again like the television and radio talk shows, and all the rest.

Question: I liked your analogy between eating food and sexuality, but my concern is that I don't know that it's for my teenager. He actually prefers fast foods to gourmet (laughter from audience).

Answer: Yes, I understand that, and it's not his fault. It's because we

haven't really allowed this individual in our society to taste the gourmet. So they don't know any better. The reason why he likes fast food better is because he thinks the fast food is gourmet. All the rest are lousy foods. So, yes, it's a dilemma... Last night at a fireside, we were talking about this. It is a dilemma because we Bahá'ís, by virtue of being Bahá'ís, are abnormal people. In other words, we're not like the norm. What we have to do with our young people is to give them the courage to be different. The courage to stand out. The courage to face other people who make fun of them for saying they don't like hamburgers. You see? We have to instill in them the courage to become unique. And that process becomes crucial in the way we raise our children. This is a very significant issue, because in this society we are expected to encourage children to become like everybody else so they don't feel bad. Well, of course they should feel bad. They have to become unique people. Because everybody is created unique. And they have to be different. And it's alright to be different, and it's alright for other people to make fun of you, because you're not like anybody else. And I hope that the young people here realize that, and are proud of their uniqueness, rather than trying to be like everybody else. To be a Bahá'í, you are unique. And to be chaste, you are unique. And by having discipline, you are unique. And believe it or not, in the long run you make an impact which is far, far more powerful than those who become like everybody else, like sheep and cattle. And sheep and cattle are just nobody.

(Applause)

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