

On Marriage

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Jacqueline A. Carleton PhD.

In ages past, seekers of the deeper mysteries of life left their homes and close relationships in favor of the seclusion of a monastery or a solitary journey, facing their dragons with only their faith for companionship. Two myths come to mind in this context: the travels of Odysseus and the myth of Eros and Psyche. In both of these, the seeker essentially travels alone completing the tasks ordained by the gods. For many people today, however, the wilderness that brings us face to face with our gods and demons is in our intimate relationships. As marriage becomes less a joining of property and families and more a conscious joining of individual souls, we can learn to use the difficulties in our relationships as opportunities to awaken and bring forth our finest human qualities. Perhaps only in this century have people truly sought to unite in themselves and in their relationships the three forces of love, sexuality and eros.

I know that each of you has spent many years discovering and developing your selves deeply as individuals. Today marks your intention to join those journeys into what will surely, if you allow it, become a crucible of transformation. It may be all too easy to allow your lives to be consumed by shared obligations and structures at the expense of passion and creativity. You will need to allow the eros which originally attracted you to draw you to each other to play, to enjoy, to bask in the ecstasy that is rightfully yours.

It is important for you to remember that your souls have been drawn to each other to complete each of your life tasks, and that each of you possesses the attributes that will irritate and inspire the other to become his or her highest self. If you allow your true selves to marry, your marriage will become an ideal environment for the nourishment of each of you. Therefore, as you step into marriage choosing this particular person to love and make your life with, you are choosing to be affected. Your soul will be ground and polished through the actions and character of your beloved, through the praise, criticism, frustration, excitement, actions and inactions of the person you marry today.

To know that marriage has a high spiritual purpose is to be willing to bear the challenges that lie along its path. But it is also to rejoice and be glad, to bask in the companionship of the person who delights you, to participate in the joys of incarnation as happy animals, creatures of passion and habit and comfort.

Intimate relationships are utterly terrifying and mysterious. But, if we crave the ecstasy they can bring, we must be prepared to undergo the agony as well. What is that agony? Personal exposure, feelings of helplessness, and ultimate loss. However, if we are willing to deeply know and be deeply known by our partner, it is possible to have a marriage far more gratifying than most people would ever even hope to experience.

In order to deeply know and be known, you must be willing to become ever more mature, differentiated human beings. You must seek to express who you really are even when your partner does not respond with empathy, affirmation or approval. Precisely because you mean so much to each other, it will be increasingly difficult to risk such depth of expression as your relationship and your shared lives and work become increasingly intertwined.

Deep intimacy in a committed relationship does not come naturally: it is a learned ability and an acquired taste. As you develop, grow and -yes- as you age, you will become more differentiated as individuals and better able to validate yourselves. You will be able, in the crucible of your marriage, to look at your human capacities for hatred, sadism, control, your secret needs and insecurities, your sexual fantasies and your terrors of rejection and of being ultimately alone. By facing these aspects of yourselves and each other, by giving up the remaining vestiges of the child's hopes for unconditional love, you will truly find each other. The paradox is that acute awareness of your ultimate loneliness and separateness will lead you to greater heights of intimacy than you could ever have dreamed of. Rather than fusion, real intimacy consists in deeply knowing oneself in the presence of the other while recognizing the other's immutable separateness. Only in complete surrender to your core self and its immutable singularity will you find ultimate union with each other.

It takes tremendous courage, integrity and faith to risk the journey you are undertaking today. But, at its apogee you will find self-transcendence , true spirituality , and fun.