

# BETROTHAL

The definition of “betrothal” can be traced back to the Old Testament. The laws of divorce in the Torah begin with the phrase: "**When a man takes a wife and engages in marital relations with her...**". (Deut 24.1). The laws of betrothal and marriage are derived from this passage. In Jewish law, "betrothal" (*kidushin*) is not simple engagement, but rather a legally binding relationship that establishes a quasi-marital bond between the betrothed couple. The marital bond is not fully actualized until "marriage" (*nesu'in*), which occurs when the couple first engages in marital relations.

The Biblical term “betrothal” is very often used in spiritual life of an individual. Betrothal is a kind of relationship in spiritual life that is almost closer to matrimonial union and in spiritual life it is spiritual marriage. Let us analyse it this way: "Full" marital relations involve the union of the souls of the couple, not just their bodies. By the same token, full union is not possible without bodily union, either. But the ideal is that these two types of union enhance each other. Therefore, no matter how close the couple become by being betrothed, their full spiritual union is not possible until their marriage is consummated. St. Teresa gives the name of "spiritual betrothal" to passing foretastes of the transforming union, such as occur in raptures.

We all know that spiritual life is an adventurous journey like the life of a couple in the world. In spiritual life a soul/person seeks to find the Divine and enjoy the benefits of being united to the Divine. This process is arduous and painstaking. The end result is peace and happiness. Spirituality and prayer also provide people with an opportunity to engage in a meditative process. Meditation has been shown to have a strong link with deeper spiritual well-being

because it calms the body, reduces stress and anxiety, and also supports positive thinking. The cultivation of “sacred moments” in daily life, whether through journal-writing or daily spiritual exercises, has been associated with reduced levels of stress and an increase in psychological well-being, which can be considered also as spiritual satisfaction. Finally, both spirituality and organized religion can help provide people with perspective, hope, and a deeper sense of meaning and a path towards union with God. By believing in something greater than themselves, it may help them stay positive in times of sadness, and foster resilience in its role as a coping strategy and take great risks in that direction. This experience ultimately leads the seeker to come closer to divine reality. In Christian Spirituality it is termed as spiritual betrothal and culminates in Spiritual marriage.

According to St. John of the Cross, Spiritual betrothal is a time of deeper love and mutual surrender; the two lovers feel each other's pain, share ever deeper communications, appreciate each other's longings, show mutual gratitude for graces and gifts, and yearn for union. The bride develops “a singular and intense love for God,” and “his absence is a singular and intense torment for her” (Spiritual Canticle 17.i). In this growth of love and self-surrender “a singular fortitude and a very sublime love are also needed for so strong and intimate an embrace from God” (Spiritual Canticle 20-21.i). Even before spiritual marriage she gives her love and surrender to her Bridegroom (Spiritual Canticle 22.v). According to St. Teresa of Avila the spiritual betrothal happens in the Sixth Mansion of the Interior Castle: in the 6th mansion – is where we experience more profoundly the grandeur of Jesus as God and King, and along with an awareness of how much further we need to go to become the beautiful beings God intended us to be. In this mansion we realize more profoundly the love of God and we respond to Him as His beloved... His betrothed. Here we know our calling to love and intimacy, but experience the prolonged times of separation all who

are betrothed experience before consummation. As we long for consummation, we realize the pain of waiting.

What is spiritual betrothal? It is a deep religious experience of the Divine being very close and in deep relationship. Generally, religiosity can be defined as one's relationship with an established faith tradition or doctrine about a sacred other or supernatural power, while spirituality can often be defined as "the intrinsic human capacity for self-transcendence, in which the self is embedded in something greater than the self, including the sacred" and which motivates "the search for connectedness, meaning, purpose, and contribution and union." However, these abstract ideas are measured in many different ways, from frequency of church attendance to asking people "how religious are you?" As for mental well-being and happiness, studies look at indicators of mental well-being, both negative (i.e. depression) and positive (i.e. self-reported happiness, self esteem, positive relationships with others). A recent survey of the studies (meta-analysis) examines the different definitions and measurements of religiosity/spirituality as well as mental effects and spiritual absorption. But when religious experience peaks in one's life, he/she cannot but live in such a great peace that people in worldly terms cannot understand that attitude. When spiritual betrothal is experienced, there is a tremendous elevation of the person in his or her relationship, work, daily activities, prayer etc.

We can give examples of those who have reached spiritual experiences like 'spiritual betrothal' in the life of St. John of the Cross, St. Teresa of Avila, Little Therese of Lisieux, St. Catherine of Siena etc. This experience made them take bold steps to exercise heroic virtues and risk their lives for others.

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