

Some Thoughts on the Meaning of Marriage On the Occasion of the Hannah Bindig and Jeff Klagholz Wedding

I would like to welcome you here today to the wedding of Hannah and Jeff.

I'm Sandy Brainard, Hannah's uncle, and I was very pleased and honored to be asked by Hannah and Jeff to officiate at their wedding. My background is world religions and philosophy, and they have also asked me to say a few words about marriage from this perspective.

In my reading of world religions, the importance and meaning of marriage flows from the ultimate nature of things. It is this connection I find between marriage and the underlying nature of our lives in this universe that I'd like to talk about.

One place religions tell us about this underlying nature of ourselves and the universe is in their stories of creation. In these stories, the universe comes to exist as a consequence of two opposing forces or currents.

In the first of these two currents, the one becomes many. In Genesis, God divides light from darkness and land from water and creates creatures of different kinds. In Hinduism, one story has an egg that hatches to become the universe with all its diversity. Another Hindu story has one primal being dividing into a male and a female, who, in turn, mate to produce humankind, then divide and mate again and again to produce all creatures. The Dao De Jing, the best-known of China's scriptures, puts it like this:

*The Dao begot one.
One begot two.
Two begot three.
And three begot the many myriad things.*

So, in the first current, the one becomes many.

In the second current, however, the many join together in various ways to become one. The Dao De Jing continues like this:

*The many myriad things carry yin and embrace yang.
They achieve harmony by combining these forces.*

In the second Hindu story, recall how all of creation arises from the coming together of a primordial pair of beings. And Genesis' story of Adam and Eve is another example of the centrality of the joining of two beings in these stories of creation.

But if coming together in this sense were all there was to the second current's expression in human life, you and I wouldn't be here today celebrating this marriage. Two people can have and raise children without a wedding ceremony. Nor would we be here if Jeff and Hannah simply wanted to be friends and live together. They are already close and loving friends. We are here today because — as Jeff and Hannah expressed to me — marriage is for them something more than this.

What, then, is it that marriage might add to our lives?

I daresay that many of you would be hard-pressed to answer this question. Jeff and Hannah spent a long time with it. I think the reason it's difficult traces to where the second current expresses itself in our lives.

Look around yourself in this room. Notice that what you see — what your eyes show you — are people, chairs, lake, gazebo. In other words, your eyes show you just the “many myriad things” of the first current.

So, where *do* we find the second current in our lives?

To find the many-becoming-one in its distinctive expression in human life, let's look instead in the *spaces between things* and in what we build into these spaces. It is in the spaces between us where we interact with each other and, over time, build intangible structures that most of us here would probably agree are the most important achievements in our lives.

It is here in the spaces between us that we becomes friends, workmates, companions, lovers, partners, spouses. Jeff and Hannah frequently used the word “home” to describe what they are looking for in marriage. Again, it is in the spaces between us where we build a home. A home is something intangible; it's not just wood and stone.

Jeff and Hannah also spoke of marriage as a *committed relationship*, and it's here I think that we get to the crux of the matter of how we build meaning into the spaces between us. This building process takes *time*. Like a growing plant or aging wine, it's over time that what we create in these spaces comes to maturity.

And this maturity of a relationship is also something I think is closely intertwined with the two currents of our universe — both currents, not just the second. I believe that, whether we realize it or not, what we seek in our lives and in our marriages is the source of these two currents — the place where two people like Jeff and Hannah are-and-remain two people with their different interests and points of view, and yet, at the same time, without losing their differences, they become also one.

This, too, Hannah and Jeff have talked about — how to remain two individuals yet become one in their relationship. I'm not sure if I mentioned it to them, but I sometimes think that marriage asks us to be three people simultaneously. We are each asked to be ourselves, of course; there is nothing meaningful to a relationship if we are not fully ourselves. But we are also each asked to empathize with our partner — be also them and incorporate in us their point-of-view as best we can. And above even this, we are also asked to be the perspective of both individuals together — to participate in life as a *team*. It's like a dance with a partner where we are each expected to create our own movement, foresee our partner's movement, and, while we are doing both these things, we are also expected to co-author the shared dance and music.

It is in this sense of how the two currents can converge in a mature relationship that I find the meaning of marriage flowing directly out of the fabric of the universe we live in.

And it's also in this sense of how the two currents can converge that I find this wedding today between Hannah and Jeff as marking their commitment to a challenging but exciting process together, a dance in which their love for each other and their perseverance might lead them into the mysterious heart of our universe, that place from which, religions claim, emerge all true and lasting joy and fulfillment.

Sandy Brainard

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