

GETTING UNMARRIED IN A MARRIED CHURCH

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MY EARLIEST MEMORY of my Bluebird class in Primary is cross-stitching a sampler: "I will light up my home." Our teacher admonished us to embroider carefully because we would want our samplers to hang in our homes after we were married. Through family, church and social rituals and practices, the goal of marriage as the proper and only lifestyle was emphasized. The act of getting married was to be the major accomplishment in my life.

Although the goal was clear, the process of how to go about getting married was mystifying. Being a serious, scholarly adolescent without an older sister or experienced friend to guide me, I was baffled by the invisible social skills of talking, laughing, flirting and asking-without-asking that other girls used to start and cement relationships. Unsure of myself, I stumbled through years of wondering if the elusive goal of getting married would ever happen. And if it didn't happen, on what could I base my self-worth? But after two years with missionary "brothers," I became sufficiently self-confident to let my intuitions and hunches guide me. The great accomplishment occurred. I was chosen. I was married.

Perhaps because of the mystery of the process (it happened so fast, so wonderfully), perhaps because of the desperation of my need (to be whole, not half), perhaps for any number of reasons, the choice was not the best for either my husband or me. Although we struggled through years of trying to make that choice fit, it simply never did.

During a painful two-year struggle that began six years after the temple wedding, I embarked on the even more confusing process of getting unmarried.

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Getting unmarried in a married church was a major, seemingly endless struggle. Becoming unconnected, unsealed when all the outside forces were saying, "Stay bonded, stay sealed," was an arduous, tortuous journey. I was primed to view marriage as the *real* entry route to eternal life. Leaving that road seemed at first like finding myself on an unpaved side road, graveled, potholed and bumpy, with no roadmaps and no definite destination.

Now, four and a half years after the final divorce, single, mothering three children and working, I have discovered that the single road is not a side road but a major highway itself. And although the roadmarkers are less conspicuous, they are there in the form of stages, cautions and techniques for changing lanes and picking up speed again. Since a marriage is a marriage of many needs—social, religious, legal, sexual, emotional and familial among others—a divorce is likewise a divorce of those many ties.

Information about the divorce process is easy to locate on bookstore shelves—legal issues, household arrangements, parenting, socializing. Such advice generally approaches the problem from the outside and implicitly guarantees a happy adjustment if a certain course is followed. But information on the process of *internal* emotional unhooking is not as readily available. My experience both as a divorced person and as a marriage and family therapist instead indicates that the wisest approach to a divorce seems to be from the inside out, from inside one's emotional center where all the dreams and hopes, fantasies and needs for marriage were first implanted.

This essay is about the internal work of getting unmarried, loosening the bonds and letting go of the needs of the past marriage from the inside out. The goal of this work is to become wholly single. There are feelings, states of mind and behaviors that indicate where one is on the road to singleness. There are ways to go through this arduous process that will create a more satisfying ending. None of these ways have been easy for me or for anyone with whom I have worked clinically, but that same experience indicates that these ideas might be helpful in averting serious problems, even tragedies. When I recommend a course of action, I either have used it or am currently working with it personally. The many friends, students, acquaintances, and clients I have shared experiences with lead me to believe that these ideas are valid for others besides myself, both men and women. Of course, there are a host of additional ideas about unmarrying that are not discussed here.

The real divorce occurs internally. I'm convinced that it never occurs for some people. They are stuck emotionally in the past relationship. Sometimes they remain single. If they remarry, they add one relationship to another, thereby being emotionally polygamous.

This emotional polygamy persists because letting go is so difficult. There are so many bonds between married people. And members of the Church will have viewed them as eternal, not just temporal bonds. In addition, we are often as tied to the institution of marriage as to a spouse. It certainly is possible to like being married without liking the person you are married to. Tying the marriage knot is more than metaphor. As people going through a divorce will admit, there are actual visceral knots in the process.

These bonds or ties can be more easily loosened if we understand them. Since we have so much difficulty consciously and intellectually gaining insight into our unconscious and emotional selves, indirect methods such as dreams, fantasies, stories, habits and rituals are frequently more successful.

The dreams, hopes and fantasies we daily experience are symbols of the ways in which we are tied to other people through our most important needs. Consciously recording them, talking about them and letting them sift through our minds in an effort to understand our own symbols of connection to our spouse can be a starting point for discovering methods of divorcing the past from the present, ourself from our marriage partner.

In addition to the dreams, hopes and fantasies, daily habits and rituals keep us consciously and unconsciously tied to being married. This family-oriented church has not accidentally emphasized an increasing number of rituals to encourage a sense of family. Going to church and other Sunday rituals, family prayer, family home evening, family scripture study and family service projects are all ways of being a family, particularly a Mormon family. Going through the forms (especially if our hearts are in them) keeps us emotionally centered in "familyness" even if the marriage relationship is not going well. In getting unmarried, we must encounter those rituals again in some way and account for them differently. Many are not very evident: the subtle patterning of bathroom and breakfast routines, of leave-taking and greeting, of touching and being touched are so familiar they are only noticed when they are disrupted.

A friend related to me that she had not realized how much she had cooked just to please her husband. After the separation she found that her children would no longer eat what they had been previously encouraged to eat. She didn't want to eat that way either. A year of haphazard eating followed: unscheduled meals, everyone getting his or her own, fixing different dishes for each person, etc. Finally they all faced the issue squarely and decided part of being a family for them was eating together. They then consciously started the compromise process of learning to eat similar food at the same time.

Even though the real divorce is emotional, and I believe, usually occurs months or even years after the legal divorce, the process of divorcing—of getting unmarried—begins much earlier with precisely those disruptions of familiar routines. When some important family or marriage ritual fails to occur (saying goodbye in the morning, for instance), the sense of malaise lets us know something is deeply wrong. Later, the disturbance extends to our thoughts, moods and even body carriage, reinforcing our awareness of the trouble the marriage is in. At some point in this disruption period, nearly always one event occurs which triggers the realization that the rift is unresolvable and the emotional fact of divorce suddenly becomes a reality. Most divorced people detail that moment or event with great clarity. It often hits like a thunderbolt and brings a storm of feelings and questions. My own storm included many devastating questions about the Church. What would the Church do with me? In addition to having my temple recommend voided, would I be released from my calling? If "no success can compensate for failure

in the home," was there anything I could ever do in the future to make up for the present damage? The old questions of self-worth flooded back. What would my family think? What would others think? How would they treat me? Would I lose friends? Being divorced in the Church seemed then more terrible than never having married. Most of all, the question kept coming: Was I worthy in the sight of the Lord? These were only some of the questions that covered the whole scope of my life. They each took months to answer.

THE STAGES OF UNMARRYING

Other writers have divided this long, convoluted and confusing period in different ways. My description comes from my own experience, observation and reading. Each stage typically takes several months. Hurrying the process doesn't often help. Major surgery heals slowly, whether it is physical or emotional. Also, these stages do not easily correspond with the legal divorce. Some people are legally divorced within weeks of realizing something is wrong. Others have fashioned a new life long before they are legally single.

The first stage is one of shock, confusion, grief, depression, anger and ambivalence. Repressed or unacknowledged insights come in whirlwind fashion. For many people there is an overwhelming sense of being out of control. Some persons cycle in and out of this stage and the next: alternating confusion and calm. Many crises happen now and will continue to happen in some fashion until both spouses clearly understand that a decision is made.

Whatever the circuituous course of this stage, a firm decision needs to be made before one can reach resolution and move on with one's life. Those who can never decide or who keep getting pulled back into the marriage generally only condemn themselves to more of the same. If recycling the decision seems to be a pattern and you are still as confused as ever, set aside a definite period of some months duration to stay *in* the marriage. Use those months to choose a definite course of action, and see a competent marriage counselor.

The last few months before the decision to divorce, I experienced excruciating periods of confusion and pain which alternated with periods of surprising clarity. The torment was overwhelming until I came to realize that one of the most difficult aspects of becoming unmarried was parting with all the hopes and dreams I had spent years nurturing. The death of my dream of a happy marriage extending into eternity hurt me in places I could never have predicted. It seemed that I was not just saying goodbye to one relationship but to all of my past teachings and commitments, goodbye to my images of forever. Closing an important door behind me with no new doors in sight was truly frightening. I was not even sure there *were* any more doors. From my current perspective, this attitude seems irrational—and it was—but that bleak loss and pain was something I had to understand. I prayed long and hard during those months. As my form of prayer changed from desperate pleas to give me a clear answer as quickly as possible to an open-ended dialogue in which I assumed responsibility for my decisions and actions, helpful insights started to come. The first major one was that I wouldn't get an answer quickly and that I would have to be patient.

Once the urgency of time was removed, I started to understand that I was saying goodbye to my past and to my whole preconceived images of future being. The clouds of confusion cleared, and I saw that I needed to clean out my congested closet of romantic fantasies, cull out the old notion that only married people were truly all right, discard the idea that life is only worth living in a married state, and accept the truth that everything else isn't "on the way to" or "instead of" marriage.

This second stage is often characterized by the feeling of relief, euphoria or resigned acceptance. There is a definite perception that your personal world is getting better. Winter is past, spring has arrived. Some experts label this the "promiscuous" stage because new freedom incites many to reach for any and all relationships in view. This time is refreshing and new but unstable. In the first stage we were vulnerable to the past. Now we are vulnerable to the present and future. Relationships are likely formed on the basis of healing past wounds or meeting long unmet needs. I feel that experimenting with many new kinds of relationships during this phase is appropriate, but that seeking for a committed relationship is not. Family members and friends who hope that you will "find someone soon" are making dangerous wishes. Friendships with people of both sexes as well as dates with different people give a perspective and balance that cannot come by narrowing in on one new relationship.

For most people this second period will last a year or two. Letting go of the past occurs slowly. Many fresh insights about ourselves and how we are with a person other than our former spouse come as we put ourselves in a variety of experiences. For me, it was exhilarating to discover that disagreements with others *could* be discussed without cycling into anger or silence, the standard pattern in our marriage.

Third comes a time of consolidating the tearing-away stage and the trying-out stages. We need to give ourselves time to move at our own internal speed. For me, new understanding about myself, the past and the directions in which I wanted to move began to emerge during this phase.

About two years after my divorce was final, I started to understand what my ex-husband meant when he called me a bitch. From the perspective of time and positive experiences in new relationships, I was able to acknowledge that I had been cold, analytical and demanding at times when my expectations were not satisfied. I finally realized that like many others, I had brought a list of expectations to marriage, and rather than tear up the list I had torn up the person. I was pained in a new way about how much damage I had inflicted. It has been two and a half years since that realization, and I have tried hard not to impose a list of demands on the new relationships in my life. I think I am succeeding—which is the only reason I can share this example.

Understanding our part in the dysfunctional relationship is crucial preparation for the fourth stage: reaching out for long-term or committed relationships that may lead to marriage. Another important criterion is detachment from the past pain and struggle. If the past consistently troubles us or the relationship with the ex-spouse is still hurtful, ambivalent or too close,

we are not ready. Readiness is signalled by a full sense of being single, not married. The feeling of transition is past.

In my view, forming new intimate relationships that are durable or that lead to marriage is a hallmark of finishing the divorce process. Dating partners or friends are chosen on the basis of current interest and needs. Rituals and habits formed will probably differ from the marriage patterns. Most certainly conflict is solved in a more satisfactory fashion. A male friend recently explained, "I knew I had made it through when I stopped comparing new women with my ex-wife."

Any unresolved dilemmas from the past that are truly important will likely re-emerge in a new relationship; thus the work of letting go must be done whatever the circumstances. This is why I believe in taking time, otherwise there might be a skeleton in the closet later. The recent film, *Chapter Two* by Neil Simon, fully illustrates the backlash the second wife inherited because her new husband had not resolved his grief after the death of his first wife.

The work of these stages is not complete until, at the end, two events have occurred: we have said an irrevocable goodbye to the marriage (though not necessarily to the spouse), and we feel ourselves fully single and unmarried. To some extent, the process applies to any separation—leaving home, recovering from the death of a spouse, adjusting to any major loss.

SAYING GOODBYE

Saying goodbye is a skill which is rarely taught and, in fact, may seem unnecessary for Mormons because of our belief that we will be eternally sealed to one another. Consequently, we don't face a final farewell even in death. However, this view, which may obscure the fact of death, can cause devastating complications in divorce. A death of a relationship is as shattering as a death of a person, but others don't take it as seriously because, after all, the person is still alive. If children are involved, we will have a relationship with the ex-spouse for the rest of our lives.

We have many rituals for beginning and continuing. Baptisms, blessings, endowments, wedding celebrations and housewarmings all provide form for startings. Anniversaries, the sacrament, going to the temple and seasonal rituals all commemorate ongoing patterns. Only funerals and missionary farewells are ending rituals and often neither acknowledges the finality of an ending in the eagerness to celebrate continuation, new opportunities. Even more rare, neither ritual attends to the fact that every person present is going through a personal rite of passage from the past to the future.

There is no public or standardized ritual for divorce; but in the last few years, I have found an astonishing array of rituals that people have privately created for themselves to aid their exit from a marriage. Some people have simulated a funeral ceremony. Others have gathered with friends or family to celebrate or commiserate. Still others take a respite from social activities to take a journey inward, to clean house and to complete unfinished business. Many accounts tell of people who strike outward and physically go to another part of the country or world to forget or to "get their feet on the ground

again." A friend who regularly celebrates and nourishes ongoing relationships by going out to dinner, takes himself alone to a restaurant when a friend dies or moves away and uses the solitary meal as a vehicle for saying goodbye. While reviewing each stage and important event in the past relationship, he lets himself feel all of the sweetness and pain that letting go means.

However, many of these newly created rituals often ignore the complexity of emotions and ties that marriage represents. A divorce ritual deserves more than just a celebration or a funeral. Most people will experience a potpourri of feelings: sadness, relief, pain, excitement. All are appropriate because an important end and an important beginning are occurring simultaneously.

If we have no public rituals and no history in our families or church of saying goodbye, what is needed? Four ideas might help.

First, we need to symbolize the truly important memories for ourselves as individuals, not as part of a married team. A few weeks before I was married, Joel Moss, a favorite professor of mine at Brigham Young University, wrote me a letter with some unique advice that I didn't know how to take at the time, even though it stuck in my mind. I learned what he really meant while divorcing. He recommended that I fully examine all my memories of past romantic relationships to understand what my dominant needs and interests in those men were. Then I should find a way to symbolize those needs for myself so that they could continue to be fulfilled yet become separate from the past relationships. My needs are legitimate and require new forms of expression in a new relationship. Examples of needs are adventure, intellectual stimulation, a sense of belonging with someone or continuity. Identifying the need will help me choose something to do or own in order to meet that need safely in the future without being trapped into trying to recreate past events.

The clearest example came from a client of mine during this last year. She had had several past experiences in which her partners always had private nicknames for her and she for them. That practice was an emotional treasure chest. She always experienced a secret glow of feeling special when she heard the names. But her most important present male friend not only did not have any nicknames for her but thought they were silly and rebuffed her few attempts to address him with an endearment.

I explored with her exactly what feelings came to her when she had heard the nicknames in the past. She said she felt special, treasured, chosen and quickly agreed that she *does* like feeling chosen and unique. I then asked her to watch her friend's behavior closely during the coming week and notice possible ways he might have of treating her as unique or treasured. During that week and the several following, she started to notice that even his casual touches were different than the way he touched others, that he talked exclusively with her about some topics, and that he always made a point of telling her children that his place was next to her in the car or at the dinner table. She started feeling treasured and special again; the need to have a nickname disappeared. In addition her fantasies and longings for the past relationships faded.

Second, the old relationship should discontinue. Its basic nature, formed on many functions (friend, lover, spouse, financial partner) should change to one (parenting) if children are involved, none if there are no children. It is possible to have a friendship with your former spouse, but generally only after the divorce process is finished. The friendship is best then reconstructed, not continued from the past.

Divorcing spouses are easily magnetized by each other. Our subtle years-long "dance" with each other in a multitude of areas renews itself almost instantaneously upon contact. We simply don't know how to act any other way with each other yet.

The unweaving of habit patterns can be facilitated in several ways. No contact at all is the most drastic and often the most jarring because our natural response is to continue: continue calling, continue trading some details about the day, family members, friends, sexual contact or affectionate interaction. Nevertheless, cutting off contact is often the most effective way to face the reality of our singleness by forcing ourselves to rely only on our own resources.

Other ways are possible. Unidimensional contact, such as only discussing parenting matters or arranging visitation, helps untie the past. This includes consciously changing old places of meeting and discontinuing most former topics of conversation. Also, find new people for old functions or find your own strength to meet your own needs.

Third, form some rituals or events for saying goodbye. Go back to old places and houses. Talk to yourself about what you remember, how it feels and what it will be like to never be there again in the old way. Provide some kind of benediction for yourself such as a prayer or leaving without looking back.

When I left the last apartment I lived in before I moved into my present house, I realized that some important transitions in my life had happened there in the two years since my divorce. After moving out all of the belongings and cleaning each room thoroughly, I reserved several hours the following morning to return by myself and say goodbye.

I walked into each empty room and sat down. Then I let the memories flood over me in whatever order they came. And I let the feelings associated with them freely surround me. I laughed; I also felt angry, exhausted, overwhelmed, enlightened and peaceful. As the memories and feelings faded, I felt a settled peacefulness and a lightening. Leaving the key inside the house, I locked the door and left. I have never gone back. I seldom think of it. Everything I need from that period in my life is within me, not back in those rooms.

Fourth, planning a future that has evolved from but that does not replicate the past can be truly helpful in unloosening old ties. Think through attachment to physical objects. Weigh carefully what you will do with them.

One person I know sorted her books after her divorce; intellectual stimulation—a feeling that important ideas expressed the essential quality of life—was significant to her, so she took the books that reflected those needs

and were associated with her. She left those that reminded her of her husband. A good rule of thumb is: If any object consistently reminds you of the other person and that reminder serves to pull you back into the past (with either positive or negative feelings), don't take it. If you decide to give it away, reflect on how and to whom you will give it. You will be giving away part of your old self and your old relationship at the same time.

People are often advised during the divorcing process to move into different quarters. I agree. When you start turning new corners in a different location, you can more easily start turning new corners inside yourself. The common practice of one partner leaving the home with little or nothing and the other staying with nearly everything may make getting unmarried more difficult for both. Being surrounded by the familiar artifacts of the disrupted marriage may be as hindering as facing the blankness of four walls with no meaning. Staying in a ward where everyone associates you with an ex-spouse may be more difficult than entering a ward alone.

You may also find that strong attachments persist with old rituals. For example, Sunday rituals are often changed dramatically. I remember facing with trepidation the idea of attending church with three children six and under. How could I get them to sit still enough for me to get any meaning out of the meeting? Weighing which parts of Sunday ritual to keep and which to change has been a trial-and-error process over the last few years. Also, family prayer has changed. It gradually seemed necessary to decide to keep the meaningful parts and to give the rest a new face.

BECOMING FULLY SINGLE

The second crucial part of getting unmarried is becoming fully single again. Those once married can probably remember how it felt to move from an internal sense of being single to feeling part of a unit, feeling married. Notice the pronouns. Many married people use *we* when talking about ideas and activities that concern only themselves. Changing from *my husband* or *my wife* to *my ex-husband* or *my ex-wife* takes conscious, at times stumbling effort. More than one man I have dated still said *we* unconsciously when talking about his career and children quite apart from his ex-wife. I believe strongly that to make one's future more successful, and certainly to facilitate future love relationships, one must become fully single before reconnecting or recommitting in a new relationship. It will not do to go from one *we* to another *we* without an intermediate *I*—our own solitary singleness in the middle.

There is always a tension between being alone and being together. On one level, we are always ultimately alone. On another level, we are always connected. We have learned to feel better about being with someone than being alone, yet it is possible to feel just as good, though in a different way, in solitude. A number of solitary modes are highly respected, such as prayer or creative work like writing. Valuing solitary time as well as communal time relieves some of the loneliness.

Committed relationships entered too quickly cause their own problems. I feel that our first goal should be to enter relationships that will help us

become single again. Only after that goal is achieved should we look for long-term relationships.

Initially don't plan on commitment from anyone, most of all yourself. It will take time and experience to make a choice that fits your best internal needs and few people know what those needs are initially.

Two time guidelines, roughly formed from marital research, are: Do not remarry within two years of the divorce. Do not marry someone whom you have known less than a year. These guidelines represent good survival sense. A second marriage choice is more complicated than a first choice; there are more factors to consider to acquire a good fit.

I made a commitment to follow both of these guidelines after my divorce became final, and within a year I was considering a permanent attachment with a man I had dated six months. Largely because of my commitment to myself, I waited. I'm grateful I did. My judgment in that relationship turned out to be very poor. I was reacting out of my past too much to have a clear awareness about how this new relationship would work in the future.

The second guideline also still holds for me. I feel an important sense of freedom about new relationships because I know I won't consider a marriage decision with that person for at least a year. More than one man has reacted positively to the open-ended sense of time. Knowing if a relationship will work over time comes before knowing if a marriage will be successful. Forming attachments slowly seems to help me make better judgments. The romantic part of me finds it difficult, but the rational part says it's worth it.

Stephen Johnson, in his enormously helpful book *First Person Singular*, details not only the necessity of becoming a fully functioning single person before moving into new relationships, but provides good advice about how to do it. Being single does not mean being half of a past or future whole person, which implies that you are "between" marriages and dependent on another person for fulfillment of half your life's needs. Instead you now face squarely the realization and responsibility (many times heavy and lonely, yet freeing) of putting together your whole life for yourself and becoming a truly independent person. This does not imply that you have no deep connections to people. On the contrary, new kinds of bondings allow sharing, caring and intimacy but do not rest happiness on one full-time relationship with the same person. I believe that two independent people who consciously choose to be interdependent with each other stand a much better chance of making a new relationship work than two people who depend on each other to make their lives happy.

The reason is obvious: without becoming fully single, we are likely to build the new relationships on the same old patterns—and hence the same old problems. Also, many people form a new attachment as a means of giving up the old. Second marriages in America do not stand a better chance of survival than first marriages (which means sixty to seventy per cent survive), which suggests that many people don't use the process of getting unmarried and remarried as a chance to grow.

Many of us, in short, are conditioned to seeing a sequence of marriage-divorce-remarriage. I am arguing for a change of attitude and perspective to

marriage-divorce-singleness before considering a committed relationship. Spelling out the sequence this way makes time a friend, rather than an enemy. Respecting the transition as a valid developmental stage will prevent us from falling into the trap of thinking that an external event (getting through the first year, getting the children in school, getting remarried) will somehow get things back to normal. *Normal* is an interior feeling, not an external event.

Friends or trusted confidantes, of both sexes, will be available during all stages of the transition. If they are, use them. If none are available, building friendships will be more important than building new dating relationships.

Fortunately for me, friends gave me immeasurable help during this period of confusion and realization. Their mirrors on my moods and actions gave me many new insights into myself. One of those friends, who is very introspective and sensitive to relationship issues, had been through the process herself and pointed out trouble spots and some guidelines. One extremely important guideline was that people would respond to my divorce about as well as I did. If I felt that what was happening is basically right, and if I felt generally good about it (no one feels ecstatic or completely settled), those around me would feel similarly. If, however, I felt terrible, overwhelmed and out of control, other people would probably also conclude that what was happening to me was terrible. That insight has not only been true for me but for many of my clients. I—and they—need to spend enough time with ourselves and with trusted friends to sort ourselves out before presenting the whole process to my outside world.

USING A SUPPORT SYSTEM

I've decided that a support system of some sort is absolutely necessary both to a good decision about the divorce, and also to the process of saying goodbye and adjusting to becoming single again. Investing wholly in a relationship puts necessary blinders on ourselves. We simply lose some objectivity that only an outside view can supply. But we need the right kinds of outside view. Some people and some kinds of advice can be lethal. Following are several guidelines I have pulled together for myself:

1. Only talk deeply about feelings and plans, to those you trust deeply. Inappropriate self-disclosure will not only make you feel more vulnerable later, but it may also invest more of you in that relationship than you want.

2. Only talk deeply to people who are not invested in the outcome of your decisions. If someone has a definite opinion about what you should decide about the marriage, and if you are still weighing it for yourself, you can be really thrown off-balance by the weight of biased advice. For this reason, consulting family members will probably result in some trouble at some time.

Likewise, in hearing a person's marital troubles, do not give advice, just support. Even if your advice is right, you stunt their ability to find answers and take responsibility for them.

My particular friend, in the long months of my making a decision, never told me what she thought I ought to do. I really didn't know what her opinion was, although I wanted it badly at times to relieve me of my own struggle for

certainty. Not until I filed for divorce, and it was clear that I was going to go through with it, did she share her thoughts with me. I am truly thankful for her support and respect for my ambivalence.

The only exception to this rule should come when a person is being physically abused or emotionally overwhelmed to the point that she or he is disoriented and is steadily losing the ability to make good judgments. Even then, direct advice is often unheeded and unhelpful. Instead, steer her or him to an outside source competent to give direction.

3. Always keep friends of both sexes around you to provide some balanced judgment about your life's decisions. Keeping silent about your emotional life is dangerous; you have lost all checks and balances. Close friends that you discuss the important areas of your life with will help keep you from forming inappropriate ties too early.

4. Weigh the advice within yourself, not by taking a vote from friends and relations. This means spending hours—lonely at times and sweet at others—pondering, contemplating and listening only to your own inner voices. They will be many, but the wheat will emerge gradually from the chaff in the practice of external silence, internal listening. Sometimes a journal is helpful in the sorting-out process. Prayer that listens more than asks is a vehicle to many insights. Contemplation and meditation techniques train you to quiet yourself in disquieting times.

DEALING WITH THE CHURCH

Being single in a married church is very different from being married in a married church. The connection to the Church alters for many during the process of joining a minority. If, while being married, we felt that being single indicated weakness, maladjustment or unworthiness, we may find ourselves taking those labels on ourselves in the transition to singlehood.

For example, regardless of the reason for divorce, a temple recommend becomes void when the divorce is final. The newly divorced person must then go back to the bishop and stake president to renew the recommend. For some this can be a supportive process; others experience it as inappropriate interrogation. If the divorce did not involve sexual misconduct, the recommend is relatively easy to obtain. If sexual issues are involved, the process can be lengthy. If having a current temple recommend in your possession is one of the standards of worthiness that you have used, you may feel some strain.

It might be helpful to draw a distinction between being worthy in the Lord's eyes and being judged worthy in the Church's view. The former is based on internal criteria (one's relationship with the Lord, spiritual maturity, personal revelation), the latter on external rules (amount of compliance to commandments and policy). Also, being worthy according to the Lord seems to imply adherence to eternal principles (seeking after righteousness, being compassionate, honest and humble, serving others, etc.) while being worthy according to the Church is more concretely defined in terms of specific rules

(keeping the Word of Wisdom, church attendance, sustaining the General Authorities, etc.).

If you make choices different from those sanctioned by the Church (deciding to remain single or becoming sexually active), additional strains may appear. Another separation, estrangement or unloosening with the Church may start occurring. Whether the member defines this process positively or negatively, it seems to me that this process occurring simultaneously with the marital separation may become a double divorce and prove overwhelming or devastating. If possible, take one issue at a time instead of trying to deal with everything at once. One acquaintance purposely put some serious questions about certain Church issues on “hold” until her marital decision was made. She said that it was difficult to consciously ignore many important issues, but that she was glad she waited until she had strength to give them her full energy.

Also, if you were married in the temple, the time lag between the two divorces—civil divorce and cancellation of sealing (if it occurs)—can cause a time lag within oneself. At what point do you really think of yourself as unmarried? In addition, if a cancellation has not been received by the time a person decides to remarry, the new spouse may experience feelings of being “second-rate” until the previous union has been voided. Often members, particularly women, have been advised not to seek a cancellation until they are about to remarry so that they won’t be left single in the eternities. How can one feel eternally secure having a spouse one cannot feel mortally secure with? Finally, a man may remarry without a cancellation of sealing; a woman may not. In a recent discussion, an active male member had a hard time understanding why his fiancée wanted him to apply for a cancellation of sealing before his marriage to her. She said she wanted all the ties unloosened. He replied, “What does it matter? Polygamy will be the order of heaven in the next life.” She retorted that she didn’t want to be a second wife—then or now.

Another church policy that can cause newly single members difficulty concerns church callings. Some leadership positions in the Church may not be filled by single adults. Those who have previously held such positions often lose them in the transition of divorce. Others realize that, although comparably capable or worthy, they will never have those opportunities open to them. Presiding authorities even within the Young Special Interest and Special Interest organizations are almost always married, and may have little understanding of the experience of being single. A year ago, the annual three-day singles’ conference at BYU featured a program in which an overwhelming majority of the speakers were married.

Also, the emphasis on getting married, reiterated often over church pulpits, can add frustration to the lives of single people. In my experience, most single adults already value marriage and are doing everything within their conscious power to become married. Exhortations or admonitions are not often helpful because they emphasize marriage as an accomplishment, and the implication is that the single person doesn’t quite measure up. If worth

in the kingdom is attached to being married, many may feel like misfit members, whatever the activity.

One of the largest areas of confusion and struggle for church members becoming single again is in the area of sexuality. My own thoughts, feelings and discoveries in the process of becoming single are individual, but they have been reinforced by my clients, LDS or not.

Every single adult Mormon person, man or woman, that I have talked with about sexuality echoes a common theme: How can I have my sexual needs legitimately met? How do I explore and nurture my sexuality when the church restrictions on sexual conduct are so inflexible?

To me, even phrasing the questions in this manner reflects an assumption that sex is dangerous and negative and that people who have any sexual contact are evil or fallen.

I believe that we need to reframe how we view sexuality. Sexual feelings, thoughts and urges are powerful, but not necessarily dangerous. They come without conscious will at many times, but so do urges to eat, sleep, laugh and play. I see sexuality as basically positive—and not just for reproduction or for enhancing marital communication. The same energy that stirs sexual growth is conducive to growth in the other areas of the soul. For example, how many parents have experienced an increased ability to be spontaneously nurturant with their children the morning after a wonderful evening of having nurtured themselves with lovemaking? I believe that my resources to discipline my sexual urges to serve my overall well-being increase when I view my sexuality as an integral, good part of me. I feel that sexual thoughts, feelings and fantasies are welcome. But that still leaves me free—and responsible—to choose my action, and I can choose to have sexual interaction occupy a minor role in my overall life's activities.

Since most people experience their sexuality nonverbally and nonrationally, these patterns and needs are very difficult to face objectively during a time of difficult transition. Exploring the possibility of having sexual and affectionate needs met with new people in new ways is confusing, exciting, often frightening.

In my opinion, one of the central points of confusion is between sexual and affectionate behavior. They can be mutually exclusive. It is possible to be nourished and warmed by affectionate interaction that excludes whatever sexual behavior you feel is outside your sexual values. It is, of course, also possible to be sexually satisfied without a shred of affection. Most people getting unmarried have fused the two because they had their affectionate and sexual needs met by the same person. Also, most divorcing persons have had the sexual and affectionate components of the marriage disrupted long before the legal process begins. The unmet needs in both areas may be intense. We need to discern between intimacy and erotic needs. Too often we use *intimacy* as an euphemism for *sex*, thereby losing sight of the possibilities of emotional intimacy.

We are often most vulnerable in our sexual behavior not just because our bodies are unclothed but also because our emotions hold sway to a larger

degree than at other times. A large part of the enjoying and being enjoyed is letting ourselves go—abandoning ourselves to the spontaneity of impulse within safe boundaries. After divorce the safe boundaries are gone, and usual patterns of impulses, hopes and wants are frustrated at the precise time when we need release, new spontaneity for discovering new ways and most certainly support in healing our wounds—those long held or newly acquired.

Many of our dreams and fantasies about being whole, being totally accepted and loved are sexual. Although total acceptance is never possible continuously, we all need it momentarily. We need to be fed through heart and soul regularly to maintain a sense of wholeness, of being connected to others and of basic humanness and worthwhileness. At this time the intensity of sexual feeling and expression matches the intensity of our need to be loved and desired.

For the divorcing person, this need to feel whole instead of fragmented, connected instead of broken, and worthwhile instead of worthless is paramount. A friend related that one of the very satisfying parts of getting married was the special feeling of being “chosen,” but that one of the most excruciating parts of divorcing was feeling “unchosen”—rejected, thrown away.

So how, when feeling most vulnerable, rejected, do we acquire what we need?

First, separate emotional closeness from the erotic. Make the distinction initially in your mind and then in your being. Recognize that there are many ways to closeness that are satisfying (all have their risks, of course) without focusing on the sexual. This is not to say that the erotic feelings are wrong, but that erotic expression is unavailable to many in appropriate ways, or that the intensity of the need or the timing of the wish doesn't fit the relationship one is currently in. Irv Polster, a well-known therapist, after having his head rubbed by a friend, reportedly said, “This feels as good as sex, but our lives aren't organized for sex.”

Second, focus on the sensations of touching (notice the warmth, softness, closeness, contact) wherever you encounter it. Many occurrences happen daily: touching colleagues on the arm or back, holding a child, petting an animal, receiving or giving a massage with a friend.

Many times when I feel exhausted, drained or bruised, the most nourishing thing for me to do is to ask a friend to hold me. Arms tight around me with a shoulder for my head reconnects me and literally recharges me with energy. I feel cared for and united not only with that person but with the rest of humanity.

As an experiment, I asked a client of mine who was feeling lonely and isolated, even though active in work and Church, to thoroughly notice, savor and enjoy every time she was touched, even fleetingly, through the coming day. She reported being astonished not only at how much touching occurred but also at how satisfying that contact was when she noticed it. Not all, but some of the loneliness drained away.

At some point (very often, in fact) a divorced person says, “This isn't enough. What I really need is warm, loving sex.” You're right. We all need

it. However, if it is not available or if it is inappropriate to your value standards, focusing on what is lacking only increases the emptiness and longing.

At those times we have to face ourselves and say "I don't have what I really want, but that it not so terrible. What I have will have to do, and it is *enough*." When I find within myself what is enough, it gradually becomes plenty, and I learn to acquire nurturing and warmth from what is available to me. By dreaming, fantasizing and thinking of the ultimate fulfillment (which being married doesn't guarantee as we painfully know), we lose sight of what is enough, and then what we have is not acceptable. Yet paradoxically, focusing on the small incidents—smiles, touches, hugs—lowers our threshold and all contact is included in the boundary of being enough.

Another unexpected event can happen. All forms of touching acquire a truly wonderful validity. No longer is sexual touching "real" touching with everything else secondary.

CONCLUSION

Now that I feel myself fully single, the world is entirely different from before. It feels as whole as being married once did. Being single has allowed me to collect all the parts of myself, has forced me to acknowledge my responsibility for all the functions in my life and has finally allowed me to feel the freedom that competence and mastery give.

My perspective now is that being married or being single are both simply circumstances. Both are conducive to growth. Neither is easy. Both require us to face the same basic dilemmas of life: survival, spiritual growth, balancing our own needs with others. The question now seems not "When will I get remarried?" but "Which circumstance is currently best for me?"

Where I go from here is unclear to me. I have never before felt so much uncertainty about my future with so much security. I do know that I want to continue growing, finding better ways to love and help people, feeling more deeply and richly, continuing the spiritual search the gospel invites us to do. I feel as eternally connected to many of my family members and friends as I ever felt married to my former spouse. My commitment to the motto on my Bluebird sampler has never been truer—but who could have imagined all the wonderful ways to do it? The context of how I play out my life now doesn't seem as important as the means I use in doing it. My eternal well-being now seems to rest more with how I am internally linked to the Lord and other people than with how I am externally connected by formal bonds, ties or ordinances.