

# **FAMILY OF ORIGIN: Significance in Marriage Preparation.**

**by Mike & Joan Hoxsey : Youngstown OH, "Family Knight", July 1990 (revised Sept.2000)**

As most sponsor couples for marriage preparation know, there is a new edition of the *For Better and Forever* program. Like the previous (1989) edition, *For Better and For Ever* continues to emphasize the importance of a thorough investigation of and sharing of each person's family of origin. In the newest edition, there are 4 chapters (Chapter 2 - 5) which assist couple with this critical task.

## **Why is this study so important?**

Listen to what Rabbi Edwin Friedman says in his book *Generation to Generation: Family Process in Church and Synagogue*: "The failure of premarital counseling to effect the divorce rate today may be due primarily to the fact that the approach is often directed toward the couples relationship. The focus on personality, psychodynamics and transactions has deprived couples of a more enriching perspective from which to evaluate their problems and their future. Here, especially, the individual model has diluted the healing power of the clergy, whose entry into families during courtship is almost an exclusive bailiwick. *By switching the focus to the bride and groom's families of origin, not only can premarital counseling be made more effective in its own right...but the very experience also becomes an opportunity to affect more than one couple and for more than one generation.*"

What Rabbi Friedman calls to our attention is the importance of realizing that all individuals are part of a family system. What happens in our family system never happens to just one person (e.g. a daughter engaged to be married) isolated from other persons in the system. In a sense each person has a "function" in the system, a role each one plays in keeping the system in "balance". Family theorists call this concept homeostasis, that is, the tendency of any set of relationships to strive perpetually, in self corrective ways, to preserve the organizing principles of its existence. For instance, alcoholic or co-dependent families organize around the addict (workaholic, alcoholic or sports addict, etc.) role and other family members play other roles, such as, hero, scapegoat, lost child, clown, parentified child, etc. The principal of homeostasis, simply stated, explains why when one person in the alcoholic family changes his/her role the family so often tries to change the person back.

Homeostasis also explains something about marriage preparation and marriage in general. Persons are most often attracted to people with whom they (subconsciously perhaps) believe they can recreate homeostasis (order). In other words "falling in love" is often a matter of finding someone with whom we can "work out" family of origin issues.

We tend either to choose someone who is like or radically un-like our family of origin as a marriage partner. What we attempt to do with the partner is recreate the role we played in our family of origin. The problem with this is that our spouse is neither our parent nor a sibling, and is not likely to grasp why we are choosing to act in such a manner.

Marriage, to be "successful", has to be a relationship between two mature, well-defined people. In order to be mature one has to be able to really "leave" one's family of origin and the role played in it and choose to be with another person in marriage. We will be free and mature only to the extent we are conscious of who we were/are in our family of origin.

As persons involved in marriage preparation ministry we are not expected to be therapists. That is not the intent of the new *For Better and Forever* materials. What we are expected to be are people who have become aware our own marital relationships. *Having reflected on our families of origin and their impact on our own marriage, we can encourage engaged couples to begin their own process of discovering how their past will affect their marriage.*

#### SOME ISSUES AND SOME QUESTIONS THAT MAY BE HELPFUL IN DEVELOPING AWARENESS MIGHT BE:

- 1) What role did I play in my family of origin? *E.g.* hero, parentified child (who parented siblings), clown, pacifier, scapegoat, lost child, *etc.*
- 2) What makes me most anxious when I think about my relationships within my family of origin?
- 3) Do I see a connection between these issues and my marriage? If so, what is it?

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