A Chaste and Holy Life

A Compilation Prepared by the Research Department
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Such a chaste and holy life, with its implications of modesty, purity, temperance, decency, and clean-mindedness, involves no less than the exercise of moderation in all that pertains to dress, language, amusements, and all artistic and literary avocations. It demands daily vigilance in the control of one's carnal desires and corrupt inclinations. It calls for the abandonment of a frivolous conduct, with its excessive attachment to trivial and often misdirected pleasures. It requires total abstinence from all alcoholic drinks, from opium, and from similar habit-forming drugs. It condemns the prostitution of art and of literature, the practices of nudism and of companionate marriage, infidelity in marital relationships, and all manner of promiscuity, of easy familiarity, and of sexual vices…

("The Advent of Divine Justice" (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1984), p. 30)

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The Bahá'í Standard
A Chaste and Holy Life
The Power of Example

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The Bahá'í Standard

The Nature of Bahá'í Law

They whom God hath endued with insight will readily recognize that the precepts laid down by God constitute the highest means for the maintenance of order in the world and the security of its peoples….

O ye peoples of the world! Know assuredly that My commandments are the lamps of My loving providence among My servants, and the keys of My mercy for My creatures. Thus hath it been sent down from the heaven of the Will of your Lord, the Lord of Revelation….

Say: From My laws the sweet smelling savour of My garment can be smelled, and by their aid the standards of victory will be planted upon the highest peaks. The Tongue of My power hath, from the heaven of My omnipotent glory, addressed to My creation these words: "Observe My commandments, for the love of My beauty." Happy is the lover that hath inhaled the divine fragrance of his Best-Beloved from these words, laden with the perfume of a grace which no tongue can describe. By My life! He who hath drunk the choice wine of fairness from the hands of My bountiful favour, will circle around My commandments that shine above the Dayspring of My creation.

Think not that We have revealed unto you a mere code of laws. Nay, rather, We have unsealed the choice Wine with the fingers of might and power. To this beareth witness that which the Pen of Revelation hath revealed. Meditate upon this, O men of insight!

("Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh", rev. ed. (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1984), sec. CLV, p. 331; pp. 332–33) **[1]**

Just as there are laws governing our physical lives, requiring that we must supply our bodies with certain foods, maintain them within a certain range of temperatures, and so forth, if we wish to avoid physical disabilities, so also there are laws governing our spiritual lives. These laws are revealed to mankind in each age by the Manifestation of God, and obedience to them is of vital importance if each human being, and mankind in general, is to develop properly and harmoniously. Moreover, these various aspects are interdependent. If an individual violates the spiritual laws for his own development he will cause injury not only to himself but to the society in which he lives. Similarly, the condition of society has a direct effect on the individuals who must live within it.

(From a letter dated 6 February 1973 written by the Universal House of Justice to all National Spiritual Assemblies, published in "Messages from the Universal House of Justice 1968–1973" (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1976), pp. 105–6) **[2]**

We have considered your several letters and have noted your questions, and your view that many Bahá'í youth in ... are confused, and are pleading for guidance in simple clear language on how to meet daily situations, particularly those involving sex.

It is neither possible nor desirable for the Universal House of Justice to set forth a set of rules covering every situation. Rather is it the task of the individual believer to determine, according to his own prayerful understanding of the Writings, precisely what his course of conduct should be in relation to situations which he encounters in his daily life. If he is to fulfil his true mission in life as a follower of the Blessed Perfection, he will pattern his life according to the Teachings. The believer cannot attain this objective merely by living according to a set of rigid regulations. When his life is oriented toward service to Bahá'u'lláh, and when every conscious act is performed within this frame of reference, he will not fail to achieve the true purpose of his life.

Therefore, every believer must continually study the sacred Writings and the instructions of the beloved Guardian, striving always to attain a new and better understanding of their import to him and to his society. He should pray fervently for Divine Guidance, wisdom and strength to do what is pleasing to God, and to serve Him at all times and to the best of his ability.

(From a letter dated 17 October 1968 written by the Universal House of Justice to an individual believer) **[3]**

As to chastity, this is one of the most challenging concepts to get across in this very permissive age, but Bahá'ís must make the utmost effort to uphold Bahá'í standards, no matter how difficult they may seem at first. Such efforts will be made easier if the youth will understand that the laws and standards of the Faith are meant to free them from untold spiritual and moral difficulties in the same way that a proper appreciation of the laws of nature enables one to live in harmony with the forces of the planet.

(From a letter dated 14 January 1985 written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to an individual believer) **[4]**

True Liberty

Consider the pettiness of men's minds. They ask for that which injureth them, and cast away

the thing that profiteth them….

Know ye that the embodiment of liberty and its symbol is the animal. That which beseemeth man is submission unto such restraints as will protect him from his own ignorance, and guard him against the harm of the mischief-maker. Liberty causeth man to overstep the bounds of propriety, and to infringe on the dignity of his station. It debaseth him to the level of extreme depravity and wickedness.

Regard men as a flock of sheep that need a shepherd for their protection. This, verily, is the truth, the certain truth. We approve of liberty in certain circumstances, and refuse to sanction it in others. We, verily, are the All-Knowing.

Say: True liberty consisteth in man's submission unto My commandments, little as ye know it. Were men to observe that which We have sent down unto them from the Heaven of Revelation, they would, of a certainty, attain unto perfect liberty. Happy is the man that hath apprehended the Purpose of God in whatever He hath revealed from the Heaven of His Will, that pervadeth all created things. Say: The liberty that profiteth you is to be found nowhere except in complete servitude unto God, the Eternal Truth. Whoso hath tasted of its sweetness will refuse to barter it for all the dominion of earth and heaven.

("Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh", sec. CLIX, pp. 335–36) **[5]**

…with regard to the peoples who clamour for freedom: the moderate freedom which guarantees the welfare of the world of mankind and maintains and preserves the universal relationships, is found in its fullest power and extension in the teachings of Bahá'u'lláh.

("Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá" [rev. ed.], (Haifa: Bahá'í World Centre, 1982), p. 305) **[6]**

The Bahá'í Standard of Chastity

The chosen ones of God … should not look at the depraved condition of the society in which they live, nor at the evidences of moral degradation and frivolous conduct which the people around them display. They should not content themselves merely with relative distinction and excellence. Rather they should fix their gaze upon nobler heights by setting the counsels and exhortations of the Pen of Glory as their supreme goal. Then it will be readily realized how numerous are the stages that still remain to be traversed and how far off the desired goal lies—a goal which is none other than exemplifying heavenly morals and virtues.

(From a letter dated 30 October 1924 written by Shoghi Effendi to the Local Spiritual Assembly of Ṭihrán, translated from the Persian) **[7]**

It must be remembered, however, that the maintenance of such a high standard of moral conduct is not to be associated or confused with any form of asceticism, or of excessive and bigoted puritanism. The standard inculcated by Bahá'u'lláh seeks, under no circumstances, to deny anyone the legitimate right and privilege to derive the fullest advantage and benefit from the manifold joys, beauties, and pleasures with which the world has been so plentifully enriched by an All-Loving Creator. "Should a man," Bahá'u'lláh Himself reassures us, "wish to adorn himself with the ornaments of the earth, to wear its apparels, or partake of the benefits it can bestow, no harm can befall him, if he alloweth nothing whatever to intervene between him and God, for God hath ordained every good thing, whether created in the heavens or in the earth, for such of His servants as truly believe in Him. Eat ye, O people, of the good things which God hath allowed you, and deprive not yourselves from His wondrous bounties. Render thanks and praise unto Him, and be of them that are truly thankful."

("The Advent of Divine Justice" (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1984), p. 33) **[8]**

The Bahá'í standard is very high, more particularly when compared with the thoroughly rotten morals of the present world. But this standard of ours will produce healthier, happier, nobler people, and induce stabler marriages….

(From a letter dated 19 October 1947 written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer) **[9]**

A Chaste and Holy Life

Definition

Such a chaste and holy life, with its implications of modesty, purity, temperance, decency, and clean-mindedness, involves no less than the exercise of moderation in all that pertains to dress, language, amusements, and all artistic and literary avocations. It demands daily vigilance in the control of one's carnal desires and corrupt inclinations. It calls for the abandonment of a frivolous conduct, with its excessive attachment to trivial and often misdirected pleasures. It requires total abstinence from all alcoholic drinks, from opium, and from similar habit-forming drugs. It condemns the prostitution of art and of literature, the practices of nudism and of companionate marriage, infidelity in marital relationships, and all manner of promiscuity, of easy familiarity, and of sexual vices. It can tolerate no compromise with the theories, the standards, the habits, and the excesses of a decadent age. Nay rather it seeks to demonstrate, through the dynamic force of its example, the pernicious character of such theories, the falsity of such standards, the hollowness of such claims, the perversity of such habits, and the sacrilegious character of such excesses.

("The Advent of Divine Justice" (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1984), p. 30) **[10]**

Chastity

He is My true follower who, if he come to a valley of pure gold, will pass straight through it aloof as a cloud, and will neither turn back, nor pause. Such a man is, assuredly, of Me. From his garment the Concourse on high can inhale the fragrance of sanctity…. And if he met the fairest and most comely of women, he would not feel his heart seduced by the least shadow of desire for her beauty. Such an one, indeed, is the creation of spotless chastity. Thus instructeth you the Pen of the Ancient of Days, as bidden by your Lord, the Almighty, the All-Bountiful.

("Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh", rev. ed. (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1984), sec. LX, p. 118) **[11]**

Purity and chastity have been, and still are, the most great ornaments for the handmaidens of God. God is My Witness! The brightness of the light of chastity sheddeth its illumination upon the worlds of the spirit, and its fragrance is wafted even unto the Most Exalted Paradise.

(Bahá'u'lláh, cited in "The Advent of Divine Justice", p. 32) **[12]**

Concerning the positive aspects of chastity the Universal House of Justice states that the Bahá'í Faith recognizes the value of the sex impulse and holds that the institution of marriage has been established as the channel of its rightful expression. Bahá'ís do not believe that the sex impulse should be suppressed but that it should be regulated and controlled.

Chastity in no way implies withdrawal from human relationships. It liberates people from the tyranny of the ubiquity of sex. A person who is in control of his sexual impulses is enabled to have profound and enduring friendships with many people, both men and women, without ever sullying that unique and priceless bond that should unite man and wife.

(From a letter dated 8 May 1979 written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to an individual believer) **[13]**

Moderation

Whatsoever passeth beyond the limits of moderation will cease to exert a beneficial influence. Consider for instance such things as liberty, civilization and the like. However much men of understanding may favourably regard them, they will, if carried to excess, exercise a pernicious influence upon men.

("Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh Revealed after the Kitáb-i-Aqdas" [rev. ed.], (Haifa: Bahá'í World Centre, 1982), p. 169) **[14]**

The choice of clothing and the cut of the beard and its dressing are left to the discretion of men. But beware, O people, lest ye make yourselves the playthings of the ignorant.

("Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh Revealed after the Kitáb-i-Aqdas", p. 23) **[15]**

Human utterance is an essence which aspireth to exert its influence and needeth moderation. As to its influence, this is conditional upon refinement which in turn is dependent upon hearts which are detached and pure. As to its moderation, this hath to be combined with tact and wisdom as prescribed in the Holy Scriptures and Tablets.

("Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh Revealed after the Kitáb-i-Aqdas", p. 172) **[16]**

We have made it lawful for you to listen to music and singing. Take heed, however, lest listening thereto should cause you to overstep the bounds of propriety and dignity. Let your joy be the joy born of My Most Great Name, a Name that bringeth rapture to the heart, and filleth with ecstasy the minds of all who have drawn nigh unto God.

(The Kitáb-i-Aqdas, par. 51) **[17]**

In the teachings there is nothing against dancing, but the friends should remember that the standard of Bahá'u'lláh is modesty and chastity. The atmosphere of modern dance halls, where so much smoking and drinking and promiscuity goes on, is very bad, but decent dances are not harmful in themselves. There is certainly no harm in classical dancing or learning dancing in school. There is also no harm in taking part in dramas. Likewise in cinema acting. The harmful thing, nowadays, is not the art itself but the unfortunate corruption which often surrounds these arts. As Bahá'ís we need avoid none of the arts, but acts and the atmosphere that sometimes go with these professions we should avoid.

(From a letter dated 30 June 1952 written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to a National Spiritual Assembly) **[18]**

Daily Vigilance of Actions

Arise, O people, and, by the power of God's might, resolve to gain the victory over your own selves, that haply the whole earth may be freed and sanctified from its servitude to the gods of its idle fancies—gods that have inflicted such loss upon, and are responsible for the misery of, their wretched worshippers. These idols form the obstacle that impedeth man in his efforts to advance in the path of perfection.

("Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh", sec. XLIII, p. 93) **[19]**

O SON OF BEING!

Bring thyself to account each day ere thou art summoned to a reckoning; for death, unheralded, shall come upon thee and thou shalt be called to give account for thy deeds.

("The Hidden Words of Bahá'u'lláh", rev. ed. (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1985), Arabic no. 31, p. 11) **[20]**

For desire is a flame that has reduced to ashes uncounted lifetime harvests of the learned, a devouring fire that even the vast sea of their accumulated knowledge could never quench. How often has it happened that an individual who was graced with every attribute of humanity and wore the jewel of true understanding, nevertheless followed after his passions until his excellent qualities passed beyond moderation and he was forced into excess. His pure intentions changed to evil ones, his attributes were no longer put to uses worthy of them, and the power of his desires turned him aside from righteousness and its rewards into ways that were dangerous and dark. A good character is in the sight of God and His chosen ones and the possessors of insight, the most excellent and praiseworthy of all things, but always on condition that its centre of emanation should be reason and knowledge and its base should be true moderation.

("The Secret of Divine Civilization", 2nd ed. (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1983), pp. 59–60) **[21]**

Abandonment of Frivolous Conduct

O MY FRIEND!

Thou art the daystar of the heavens of My holiness, let not the defilement of the world eclipse thy splendour. Rend asunder the veil of heedlessness, that from behind the clouds thou mayest emerge resplendent and array all things with the apparel of life.

("The Hidden Words of Bahá'u'lláh", Persian no. 73, p. 47) **[22]**

Disencumber yourselves of all attachment to this world and the vanities thereof. Beware that ye approach them not, inasmuch as they prompt you to walk after your own lusts and covetous desires, and hinder you from entering the straight and glorious Path.

("Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh", sec. CXXVIII, p. 276) **[23]**

On page 25[1] of "The Advent of Divine Justice" the beloved Guardian is describing the requirements not only of chastity, but of "a chaste and holy life"—both the adjectives are important. One of the signs of a decadent society, a sign which is very evident in the world today, is an almost frenetic devotion to pleasure and diversion, an insatiable thirst for amusement, a fanatical devotion to games and sport, a reluctance to treat any matter seriously, and a scornful, derisory attitude towards virtue and solid worth. Abandonment of "a frivolous conduct" does not imply that a Bahá'í must be sour-faced or perpetually solemn. Humour, happiness, joy are characteristics of a true Bahá'í life. Frivolity palls and eventually leads to boredom and emptiness, but true happiness and joy and humour that are parts of a balanced life that includes serious thought, compassion and humble servitude to God, are characteristics that enrich life and add to its radiance.

Shoghi Effendi's choice of words was always significant, and each one is important in understanding his guidance. In this particular passage, he does not forbid "trivial" pleasures, but he does warn against "excessive attachment" to them and indicates that they can often be "misdirected". One is reminded of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's caution that we should not let a pastime become a waste of time.

(From a letter dated 8 May 1979 written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to an individual believer) **[24]**

Alcohol

Become ye intoxicated with the wine of the love of God, and not with that which deadeneth your minds, O ye that adore Him! Verily, it hath been forbidden unto every believer, whether man or woman.

(Bahá'u'lláh, cited in "The Advent of Divine Justice", p. 33) **[25]**

The drinking of wine is, according to the text of the Most Holy Book, forbidden; for it is the cause of chronic diseases, weakeneth the nerves, and consumeth the mind.

('Abdu'l-Bahá, cited in "The Advent of Divine Justice", p. 33) **[26]**

Drugs

As to opium, it is foul and accursed. God protect us from the punishment He inflicteth on the user. According to the explicit Text of the Most Holy Book, it is forbidden, and its use is utterly condemned. Reason showeth that smoking opium is a kind of insanity, and experience attesteth that the user is completely cut off from the human kingdom. May God protect all against the perpetration of an act so hideous as this, an act which layeth in ruins the very foundation of what it is to be human, and which causeth the user to be dispossessed for ever and ever. For opium fasteneth on the soul, so that the user's conscience dieth, his mind is blotted away, his perceptions are eroded. It turneth the living into the dead. It quencheth the natural heat. No greater harm can be conceived than that which opium inflicteth. Fortunate are they who never even speak the name of it; then think how wretched is the user.

("Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá" [rev. ed.], (Haifa: Bahá'í World Centre, 1982), pp. 148–49) **[27]**

Regarding ḥashíish, you had pointed out that some Persians have become habituated to its use. Gracious God! This is the worst of all intoxicants, and its prohibition is explicitly revealed. Its use causeth the disintegration of thought and the complete torpor of the soul. How could anyone seek this fruit of the infernal tree, and by partaking of it, be led to exemplify the qualities of a monster? How could one use this forbidden drug, and thus deprive himself of the blessings of the All-Merciful?

Alcohol consumeth the mind and causeth man to commit acts of absurdity, but ... this wicked ḥashíish extinguisheth the mind, freezeth the spirit, petrifieth the soul, wasteth the body and leaveth man frustrated and lost.

('Abdu'l-Bahá, from a Tablet—translated from the Persian) **[28]**

Concerning the so-called "spiritual" virtues of the hallucinogens, ... spiritual stimulation should come from turning one's heart to Bahá'u'lláh, and not through physical means such as drugs and agents. From the description given in your letter it appears that hallucinogenic agents are a form of intoxicant. As the friends, including the youth, are required strictly to abstain from all forms of intoxicants, and are further expected conscientiously to obey the civil law of their country, it is obvious that they should refrain from using these drugs.

A very great responsibility for the future peace and well-being of the world is borne by the youth of today. Let the Bahá'í youth by the power of the Cause they espouse be the shining example for their companions.

(From a letter dated 15 April 1965 written by the Universal House of Justice to a National Spiritual Assembly) **[29]**

Bahá'ís should not use hallucinogenic agents, including LSD, peyote and similar substances, except when prescribed for medical treatment. Neither should they become involved in experiments with

such substances.

(From a letter dated 11 January 1967 written by the Universal House of Justice to a National Spiritual Assembly) **[30]**

Bahá'í Attitude Toward Sex

Briefly stated the Bahá'í conception of sex is based on the belief that chastity should be strictly practiced by both sexes, not only because it is in itself highly commendable ethically, but also due to its being the only way to a happy and successful marital life. Sex relationships of any form, outside marriage, are not permissible therefore, and whoso violates this rule will not only be responsible to God, but will incur the necessary punishment from society.

The Bahá'í Faith recognizes the value of the sex impulse, but condemns its illegitimate and improper expression such as free love, companionate marriage and others, all of which it considers positively harmful to man and to the society in which he lives. The proper use of the sex instinct is the natural right of every individual, and it is precisely for this very purpose that the institution of marriage has been established. The Bahá'ís do not believe in the suppression of the sex impulse but in its regulation and control.

(From a letter dated 5 September 1938 written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer) **[31]**

Concerning your question whether there are any legitimate forms of expression of the sex instinct outside of marriage; according to the Bahá'í Teachings no sexual act can be considered lawful unless performed between lawfully married persons. Outside of marital life there can be no lawful or healthy use of the sex impulse. The Bahá'í youth should, on the one hand, be taught the lesson of self-control which, when exercised, undoubtedly has a salutary effect on the development of character and of personality in general, and on the other should be advised, nay even encouraged, to contract marriage while still young and in full possession of their physical vigour. Economic factors, no doubt, are often a serious hindrance to early marriage, but in most cases are only an excuse, and as such should not be overstressed.

(From a letter dated 13 December 1940 written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer) **[32]**

Chastity implies both before and after marriage an unsullied, chaste sex life. Before marriage absolutely chaste, after marriage absolutely faithful to one's chosen companion. Faithful in all sexual acts, faithful in word and in deed.

The world today is submerged, amongst other things, in an over-exaggeration of the importance of physical love, and a dearth of spiritual values. In as far as possible the believers should try to realize this and rise above the level of their fellowmen who are, typical of all decadent periods in history, placing so much over-emphasis on the purely physical side of mating. Outside of their normal, legitimate married life they should seek to establish bonds of comradeship and love which are eternal and founded on the spiritual life of man, not on his physical life. This is one of the many fields in which it is incumbent on the Bahá'ís to set the example and lead the way to a true human standard of life, when the soul of man is exalted and his body but the tool for his enlightened spirit. Needless to say this does not preclude the living of a perfectly normal sex life in its legitimate channel of marriage.

(From a letter dated 28 September 1941 written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer) **[33]**

Immoral Practices are Condemned

Ye are forbidden to commit adultery, sodomy and lechery. Avoid them, O concourse of the faithful. By the righteousness of God! Ye have been called into being to purge the world from the defilement of evil passions. This is what the Lord of all mankind hath enjoined upon you, could ye but perceive it. He who relateth himself to the All-Merciful and committeth satanic deeds, verily he is not of Me. Unto this beareth witness every atom, pebble, tree and fruit, and beyond them this ever-proclaiming, truthful and trustworthy Tongue.

(Bahá'u'lláh, from a Tablet—translated from the Arabic) **[34]**

When we realize that Bahá'u'lláh says adultery retards the progress of the soul in the afterlife—so grievous is it—and that drinking destroys the mind, and not to so much as approach it, we see how clear are our teachings on these subjects.

(From a letter dated 30 September 1949 written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer) **[35]**

Amongst the many other evils afflicting society in this spiritual low-water mark in history is the question of immorality, and overemphasis of sex. Homosexuality, according to the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh, is spiritually condemned. This does not mean that people so afflicted must not be helped and advised and sympathized with. It does mean that we do not believe that it is a permissible way of life; which, alas, is all too often the accepted attitude nowadays.

We must struggle against the evils in society by spiritual means, and by medical and social ones as well. We must be tolerant but uncompromising, understanding but immovable in our point of view.

(From a letter dated 21 May 1954 written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer) **[36]**

A number of sexual problems, such as homosexuality and transsexuality can well have medical aspects, and in such cases recourse should certainly be had to the best medical assistance. But it is clear from the teaching of Bahá'u'lláh that homosexuality is not a condition to which a person should be reconciled, but is a distortion of his or her nature which should be controlled and overcome. This may require a hard struggle, but so also can be the struggle of a heterosexual person to control his or her desires. The exercise of self-control in this, as in so very many other aspects of life, has a beneficial effect on the progress of the soul. It should, moreover, be borne in mind that although to be married is highly desirable, and Bahá'u'lláh has strongly recommended it, it is not the central purpose of life. If a person has to wait a considerable period before finding a spouse, or if ultimately, he or she must remain single, it does not mean that he or she is thereby unable to fulfil his or her life's purpose.

(From a letter dated 6 February 1973 written by the Universal House of Justice to all National Spiritual Assemblies, published in "Messages from the Universal House of Justice 1968–1973" (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1976), pp. 110–11) **[37]**

Your letter asking for direct or indirect references in the Writings of the Faith to rape or sexual assault was referred to the Research Department, and we have been asked to convey to you the following comments.

"Lechery" is clearly forbidden by Bahá'u'lláh (see "Epistle to the Son of the Wolf", p. 49), and Shoghi Effendi has stated that a "chaste and holy life", according to the teachings of the Faith, implies a condemnation of "all manner" of "sexual vices". (See "Advent of Divine Justice", p. 25.)[2]

As to the contents of the Kitáb-i-Aqdas, one of the provisions of that Most Holy Book is "not to indulge one's passions" (see "Synopsis and Codification of the Laws and Ordinances of the

Kitáb-i-Aqdas", p. 50). Furthermore, reference should be made to one of the "prohibitions" mentioned on page 47 of the "Synopsis", namely "adultery". This word so appears in this book because entries in a synopsis should by necessity be brief, and by the original word used by Bahá'u'lláh in the Aqdas, i.e., "ziná", adultery is generally and mainly intended. However, this by no means covers *all* the meanings of the concept of "ziná" in legal language used in Arabic and Persian. One of the forms of "ziná"—i.e., when the illicit sexual intercourse is performed through force or violence—is rape or sexual assault.

As to the punishments for such acts as rape, these will be determined in the future by the Universal House of Justice.

(From a letter dated 8 June 1982 written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to an individual believer) **[38]**

Application of the Principle of a Chaste and Holy Life

...[absolute chastity] is mainly and directly concerned with the Bahá'í youth, who can contribute so decisively to the virility, the purity, and the driving force of the life of the Bahá'í community, and upon whom must depend the future orientation of its destiny, and the complete unfoldment of the potentialities with which God has endowed it....

As to a chaste and holy life, it should be regarded as no less essential a factor that must contribute its proper share to the strengthening and vitalization of the Bahá'í community, upon which must in turn depend the success of any Bahá'í plan or enterprise.... All of them, be they men or women, must, at this threatening hour when the lights of religion are fading out, and its restraints are one by one being abolished, pause to examine themselves, scrutinize their conduct, and with characteristic resolution arise to purge the life of their community of every trace of moral laxity that might stain the name, or impair the integrity, of so holy and precious a Faith.

A chaste and holy life must be made the controlling principle in the behaviour and conduct of all Bahá'ís, both in their social relations with the members of their own community, and in their contact with the world at large. It must adorn and reinforce the ceaseless labours and meritorious exertions of those whose enviable position is to propagate the Message, and to administer the affairs, of the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh. It must be upheld, in all its integrity and implications, in every phase of the life of those who fill the ranks of that Faith, whether in their homes, their travels, their clubs, their societies, their entertainments, their schools, and their universities. It must be accorded special consideration in the conduct of the social activities of every Bahá'í summer school and any other occasions on which Bahá'í community life is organized and fostered. It must be closely and continually identified with the mission of the Bahá'í youth, both as an element in the life of the Bahá'í community, and as a factor in the future progress and orientation of the youth of their own country.

("The Advent of Divine Justice", p. 22; pp. 29–30) **[39]**

The Power of Example

A Praiseworthy Character

Whoso ariseth, in this Day, to aid Our Cause, and summoneth to his assistance the hosts of a praiseworthy character and upright conduct, the influence flowing from such an action will, most certainly, be diffused throughout the whole world.

("Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh", rev. ed. (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1984), sec. CXXXI, p. 287) **[40]**

A Bahá'í is known by the attributes manifested by him, not by his name: he is recognized by his character, not by his person.

('Abdu'l-Bahá, from a Tablet—translated from the Persian) **[41]**

...by upholding Bahá'í law in the face of all difficulties we not only strengthen our own characters but influence those around us.

(From a letter dated 6 February 1973 written by the Universal House of Justice to all National Spiritual Assemblies, published in "Messages from the Universal House of Justice 1968–1973" (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1976), p. 107) **[42]**

The Importance of Deeds

O SON OF MY HANDMAID!

Guidance hath ever been given by words, and now it is given by deeds. Every one must show forth deeds that are pure and holy, for words are the property of all alike, whereas such deeds as these belong only to Our loved ones. Strive then with heart and soul to distinguish yourselves by your deeds. In this wise We counsel you in this holy and resplendent tablet.

("The Hidden Words of Bahá'u'lláh", rev. ed. (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1985), Persian no. 76, pp. 48–49) **[43]**

One righteous act is endowed with a potency that can so elevate the dust as to cause it to pass beyond the heaven of heavens. It can tear every bond asunder, and hath the power to restore the force that hath spent itself and vanished....

Be pure, O people of God, be pure; be righteous, be righteous....

("Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh", sec. CXXXI, p. 287) **[44]**

The Guardian has urged, over and over again, the paramount necessity for Bahá'í Youth to exemplify the Teachings, most particularly the *moral* aspect of them. If they are not distinguished for their high conduct they cannot expect other young people to take the Cause very seriously.

He heartily agrees with you that unless we *practise* the Teachings we cannot possibly expect the Faith to grow, because the fundamental purpose of all religions—including our own—is to bring man nearer to God, and to change his character, which is of the utmost importance. Too much emphasis is often laid on the social and economic aspects of the Teachings; but the moral aspect cannot be over-emphasized.

(From a letter dated 6 September 1946 written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer) **[45]**

The Effect of Example

The betterment of the world can be accomplished through pure and goodly deeds, through commendable and seemly conduct.

(Bahá'u'lláh, cited in "The Advent of Divine Justice" (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1984), pp. 24–25) **[46]**

Let your acts be a guide unto all mankind, for the professions of most men, be they high or low, differ from their conduct. It is through your deeds that ye can distinguish yourselves from others. Through them the brightness of your light can be shed upon the whole earth. Happy is the man

that heedeth My counsel, and keepeth the precepts prescribed by Him Who is the All-Knowing, the All-Wise.

("Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh", sec. CXXXIX, p. 305) **[47]**

These are the days for rendering the divine Cause victorious and effective aid! The victory of God's Faith is dependent upon teaching; and teaching is conditional upon righteous actions and goodly deeds and conduct. The foundation-stone of a life lived in the way of God is the pursuit of moral excellence and the acquisition of a character endowed with qualities that are well-pleasing in His sight. The Bahá'ís should adorn themselves with this holy raiment; with this mighty sword they should conquer the citadels of men's hearts. People have grown weary and impatient of rhetoric and discourse, of preaching and sermonizing. In this day, the one thing that can deliver the world from its travail and attract the hearts of its peoples is deeds, not words; example, not precept; saintly virtues, not statements and charters issued by governments and nations on socio-political affairs. In all matters, great or small, word must be the complement of deed, and deed the companion of word: each must supplement, support and reinforce the other. It is in this respect that the Bahá'ís must seek distinction...

(From a letter dated 8 December 1923 written by Shoghi Effendi to the Bahá'ís in Bombay—translated from the Persian) **[48]**

It is primarily through the potency of noble deeds and character, rather than by the power of exposition and proofs that the friends of God should demonstrate to the world that what has been promised by God is bound to happen, that it is already taking place and that the divine glad-tidings are clear, evident and complete. For unless some illustrious souls step forth into the arena of service and shine out resplendent in the assemblage of men, the task of vindicating the truth of this Cause before the eyes of enlightened people would be formidable indeed. However, if the friends become embodiments of virtue and good character, words and arguments will be superfluous. Their very deeds will well serve as eloquent testimony, and their noble conduct will ensure the preservation, integrity and glory of the Cause of God.

(From a letter dated 19 December 1923 from Shoghi Effendi to the Bahá'ís of the East —translated from the Persian) **[49]**

There is no doubt that the standard of spotless chastity inculcated by Bahá'u'lláh in His teachings can be attained by the friends only when they stand forth firmly and courageously as uncompromising adherents of the Bahá'í way of life, fully conscious that they represent teachings which are the very antithesis of the corrosive forces which are so tragically destroying the fabric of man's moral values. The present trend in modern society and its conflict with our challenging principles of moral conduct, far from influencing the believers to compromise their resolve to adhere undeviatingly to the standards of purity and chastity set forth for them by their Faith, must stimulate them to discharge their sacred obligations with determination and thus combat the evil forces undermining the foundations of individual morality.

(From a letter dated 22 May 1966 written by the Universal House of Justice to an individual believer) **[50]**

It is the challenging task of the Bahá'ís to obey the law of God in their own lives, and gradually to win the rest of mankind to its acceptance.

In considering the effect of obedience to the laws on individual lives, one must remember that the purpose of this life is to prepare the soul for the next. Here one must learn to control and direct one's animal impulses, not to be a slave to them. Life in this world is a succession of tests and achievements, of falling short and of making new spiritual advances. Sometimes the course may seem very hard, but one can witness, again and again, that the soul who steadfastly obeys the law of Bahá'u'lláh, however hard it may seem, grows spiritually, while the one who

compromises with the law for the sake of his own apparent happiness is seen to have been following a chimera: he does not attain the happiness he sought, he retards his spiritual advance and often brings new problems upon himself.

(From a letter dated 6 February 1973 written by the Universal House of Justice to all National Spiritual Assemblies, published in "Messages from the Universal House of Justice 1968–1973" (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1976), p. 106) **[51]**

Notes

1 On page 25 in the 1956 U.S. edition; on page 30 in the 1984 U.S. edition. ↩
2 On page 25 in the 1956 U.S. edition; on page 30 in the 1984 U.S. edition. ↩

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