Family Life

A Compilation of Extracts from the Bahá'í Writings and from Letters Written by and on Behalf of Shoghi Effendi and the Universal House of Justice

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Note ye how easily, where unity existeth in a given family, the affairs of that family are conducted; what progress the members of that family make, how they prosper in the world. Their concerns are in order, they enjoy comfort and tranquillity, they are secure, their position is assured, they come to be envied by all. Such a family but addeth to its stature and its lasting honour, as day succeedeth day.

'Abdu'l-Bahá

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I. Preservation of the Bond between Husband and Wife
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I. Preservation of the Bond between Husband and Wife

Extracts from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh

And when He desired to manifest grace and beneficence to men, and set the world in order, He revealed observances and created laws; among them He established the law of marriage, made it as a fortress for well-being and salvation, and enjoined it upon us in that which was sent down out of the heaven of sanctity in His Most Holy Book.

(*Bahá'í Prayers: A Selection of Prayers Revealed by Bahá'u'lláh, the Báb, and 'Abdu'l-Bahá* (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 2002), page 118) **[1]**

Enter into wedlock, O people, that ye may bring forth one who will make mention of Me amid My servants. This is My bidding unto you; hold fast to it as an assistance to yourselves.

(*The Kitáb-i-Aqdas: The Most Holy Book*, paragraph 63) **[2]**

All should know, and in this regard attain the splendours of the sun of certitude, and be illumined thereby: Women and men have been and will always be equal in the sight of God. The Dawning-Place of the Light of God sheddeth its radiance upon all with the same effulgence. Verily God created women for men, and men for women. The most beloved of people before God are the most steadfast and those who have surpassed others in their love for God, exalted be His glory….

(From a Tablet translated from the Arabic and Persian) **[3]**

The beginning of magnanimity is when man expendeth his wealth on himself, on his family and on the poor among his brethren in his Faith.

(*Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh Revealed after the Kitáb-i-Aqdas* (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1988), page 156) **[4]**

Extracts from the Writings and Utterances of 'Abdu'l-Bahá

Bahá'í marriage is the commitment of the two parties one to the other, and their mutual attachment of mind and heart. Each must, however, exercise the utmost care to become thoroughly acquainted with the character of the other, that the binding covenant between them may be a tie that will endure forever. Their purpose must be this: to become loving companions and comrades and at one with each other for time and eternity.…

The true marriage of Bahá'ís is this, that husband and wife should be united both physically and spiritually, that they may ever improve the spiritual life of each other, and may enjoy everlasting unity throughout all the worlds of God. This is Bahá'í marriage.

(*Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá*, paragraphs 86.1 and 86.2) **[5]**

Marriage, among the mass of the people, is a physical bond, and this union can only be temporary, since it is foredoomed to a physical separation at the close.

Among the people of Bahá, however, marriage must be a union of the body and of the spirit as well, for here both husband and wife are aglow with the same wine, both are enamoured of the same matchless Face, both live and move through the same spirit, both are illumined by the same glory. This connection between them is a spiritual one, hence it is a bond that will abide forever. Likewise do they enjoy strong and lasting ties in the physical world as well, for if the marriage is based both on the spirit and the body, that union is a true one, hence it will endure. If, however, the bond is physical and nothing more, it is sure to be only temporary, and must inexorably end in separation.

When, therefore, the people of Bahá undertake to marry, the union must be a true relationship, a spiritual coming together as well as a physical one, so that throughout every phase of life, and in all the worlds of God, their union will endure; for this real oneness is a gleaming out of the love of God.

(*Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá*, paragraphs 84.2–84.4) **[6]**

O ye two believers in God! The Lord, peerless is He, hath made woman and man to abide with each other in the closest companionship, and to be even as a single soul. They are two helpmates, two intimate friends, who should be concerned about the welfare of each other.

If they live thus, they will pass through this world with perfect contentment, bliss, and peace of heart, and become the object of divine grace and favour in the Kingdom of heaven. But if they do other than this, they will live out their lives in great bitterness, longing at every moment for death, and will be shamefaced in the heavenly realm.

Strive, then, to abide, heart and soul, with each other as two doves in the nest, for this is to be blessed in both worlds.

(*Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá*, paragraphs 92.1–92.3) **[7]**

In short, the foundation of the Kingdom of God is based upon harmony and love, oneness, relationship and union, not upon differences, especially between husband and wife. If one of these

two becomes the cause of divorce, that one will unquestionably fall into great difficulties, will become the victim of formidable calamities and experience deep remorse.

(From a Tablet translated from the Persian) **[8]**

It is highly important for man to raise a family. So long as he is young, because of youthful self-complacency, he does not realize its significance, but this will be a source of regret when he grows old.... In this glorious Cause the life of a married couple should resemble the life of the angels in heaven—a life full of joy and spiritual delight, a life of unity and concord, a friendship both mental and physical. The home should be orderly and well-organized. Their ideas and thoughts should be like the rays of the sun of truth and the radiance of the brilliant stars in the heavens. Even as two birds they should warble melodies upon the branches of the tree of fellowship and harmony. They should always be elated with joy and gladness and be a source of happiness to the hearts of others. They should set an example to their fellow-men, manifest a true and sincere love towards each other and educate their children in such a manner as to blazon the fame and glory of their family.

(From the Utterances of 'Abdu'l-Bahá translated from the Persian) **[9]**

In marriage the more distant the blood-relationship the better, for such distance in family ties between husband and wife provideth the basis for the well-being of humanity and is conducive to fellowship among mankind.

(From a Tablet translated from the Arabic and Persian) **[10]**

God's wisdom hath decreed that partners to a marriage should be of distant origins. That is, the further removed the relationship between husband and wife is, the stronger, the more beautiful and the healthier will their offspring be.

(From a Tablet translated from the Arabic and Persian) **[11]**

Surely, all must today be called to love, to unity and to kindness; to integrity, to friendship, to fellowship and to divine worship. I hope that thou and thy dear husband may continue to serve in all spirit and fragrance and that in this world ye may remain two radiant candles and from the eternal horizon ye may glisten like unto two shining stars.

(From a Tablet translated from the Persian) **[12]**

As to thy respected husband: it is incumbent upon thee to treat him with great kindness, to consider his wishes and be conciliatory with him at all times, till he seeth that because thou hast directed thyself toward the Kingdom of God, thy tenderness for him and thy love for God have but increased, as well as thy concern for his wishes under all conditions.

I beg of the Almighty to keep thee firmly established in His love, and ever shedding abroad the sweet breaths of holiness in all those regions.

(*Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá*, paragraphs 91.2 and 91.3) **[13]**

O maidservant of God! Thy letter hath arrived. Thy dear husband wisheth to complete his education and thou art eager to go to Africa. Now, ye must consult with each other, confer with the utmost love, agree upon a sound decision, and be fully united, for husband and wife must be even as one person, that they may succeed in every matter.

(From a Tablet translated from the Persian) **[14]**

You have asked whether a husband would be able to prevent his wife from embracing the divine light or a wife dissuade her husband from gaining entry into the Kingdom of God. In truth

neither of them could prevent the other from entering into the Kingdom, unless the husband hath an excessive attachment to the wife or the wife to the husband. Indeed when either of the two worshippeth the other to the exclusion of God, then each could prevent the other from seeking admittance into His Kingdom.

(From a Tablet translated from the Arabic) **[15]**

Extracts from Letters Written on Behalf of Shoghi Effendi

It is sad and distressing that ... husbands and wives have not always seen eye to eye.

In all such cases, I believe, our departed Master urged the utmost care and consideration on the part of those Bahá'í believers whose husbands were not in sympathy with their work. He thought that they ought to be won by love perhaps more than argument, but it would be very unfortunate if he objected to her work for the Faith, over and above all that she is to give to her family.

(From a letter dated 20 March 1928 to an individual believer) **[16]**

When such difference of opinion and belief occurs between husband and wife it is very unfortunate for undoubtedly it detracts from that spiritual bond which is the stronghold of the family bond, especially in times of difficulty. The way, however, that it could be remedied is not by acting in such wise as to alienate the other party. One of the objects of the Cause is actually to bring about a closer bond in the homes. In all such cases, therefore, the Master used to advise obedience to the wishes of the other party and prayer. Pray that your husband may gradually see the light and at the same time so act as to draw him nearer rather than prejudice him. Once that harmony is secured then you will be able to serve unhampered.

(From a letter dated 15 July 1928 to an individual believer) **[17]**

Shoghi Effendi trusts that ... your wife will be able to devote a little more time to her family, but he also hopes that you will be able to assist her in obtaining the time and opportunity to serve a Cause that is so dear and near to her heart and in which her services are much appreciated.

(From a letter dated 19 June 1931 to an individual) **[18]**

In regard to your question concerning the nature and character of Bahá'í marriage: As you have rightly stated, such a marriage is conditioned upon the full approval of all four parents. Also your statement to the effect that the principle of the oneness of mankind prevents any true Bahá'í from regarding race itself as a bar to union is in complete accord with the Teachings of the Faith on this point. For both Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá never disapproved of the idea of interracial marriage, nor discouraged it. The Bahá'í Teachings, indeed, by their very nature transcend all limitations imposed by race, and as such cannot and should never be identified with any particular school of racial philosophy.

(From a letter dated 27 January 1935 to a National Spiritual Assembly) **[19]**

The Bahá'í standard of sex morality is thus very high, but it is by no means unreasonably rigid. While free love is condemned, yet marriage is considered as a holy act which every human being should be encouraged, though not forced, to perform. The sex instinct, like all other human instincts, is not necessarily evil. It is a power which, if properly directed, can bring joy and satisfaction to the individual. If misused or abused it brings of course incalculable harm not only to the individual but also to the society in which he lives. While the Bahá'ís condemn asceticism and all extreme forms of self-mortification they at the same time view with disfavour the current theories of sex ethics which cannot but bring ruin to human society.

(From a letter dated 29 May 1935 to an individual believer) **[20]**

For Bahá'u'lláh explicitly reveals in His Book of Laws that the very purpose of marriage is the procreation of children who, when grown up, will be able to know God and to recognize and observe His Commandments and Laws as revealed through His Messengers. Marriage is thus, according to the Bahá'í Teachings, primarily a social and moral act. It has a purpose which transcends the immediate personal needs and interests of the parents.

(From a letter dated 14 October 1935 to an individual believer) **[21]**

As regards your husband's attitude towards the Cause: unfriendly though that may be you should always hope that, through conciliatory and friendly means, and with wise, tactful and patient effort, you can gradually succeed in winning his sympathy for the Faith. Under no circumstances should you try to dictate and impose upon him by force your personal religious convictions. Neither should you allow his opposition to the Cause to seriously hinder your activities for its spread.... You should act patiently, tactfully and with confidence that your efforts are being guided and reinforced by Bahá'u'lláh.

(From a letter dated 23 July 1937 to an individual believer) **[22]**

But while the Guardian fully approves of your wish to dedicate your whole life to the service of the Cause, he also feels the necessity of drawing your attention to the fact that in case you get married it would be your duty as a Bahá'í wife not to neglect your home duties, which indeed form a close and vital part of your general Bahá'í work. Family considerations should of course be subordinated to the collective interests and welfare of the Cause. But they should be given their due importance, if a Bahá'í wishes to lead a normal, well-balanced and constructive life. The loyalties facing a Bahá'í are not equally binding and important, but this does not necessarily make them irreconcilable.

(From a letter dated 23 November 1937 to an individual believer) **[23]**

Briefly stated the Bahá'í conception of sex is based on the belief that chastity should be strictly practised 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 to an individual believer) **[24]**

The institution of marriage, as established by Bahá'u'lláh, while giving due importance to the physical aspect of marital union, considers it as subordinate to the moral and spiritual purposes and functions with which it has been invested by an all-wise and loving Providence. Only when these different values are given each their due importance, and only on the basis of the subordination of the physical to the moral, and the carnal to the spiritual, can such excesses and laxity in marital relations as our decadent age is so sadly witnessing be avoided, and family life be restored to its original purity, and fulfil the true function for which it has been instituted by God.

(From a letter dated 8 May 1939 to an individual believer) **[25]**

The question you raise as to the place in one's life that a deep bond of love with someone we meet other than our husband or wife can have is easily defined in view of the teachings. 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....

... 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 to an individual believer) **[26]**

He is very sorry to hear of the difficulties that have arisen between you and your husband regarding the education of your children. In all cases where Bahá'ís marry non-Bahá'ís, especially of another Faith, they should have some understanding beforehand about the children's future religious training; when this has not been done, and if the parents cannot agree, the Bahá'í should turn to his Assembly for advice.

(From a letter dated 8 September 1947 to an individual believer) **[27]**

He feels very strongly that Bahá'ís, if possible, more especially Bahá'ís who serve the Cause as actively and conspicuously as you and your family do, should set the newer believers and the young Bahá'ís a high example in every way. As Bahá'u'lláh was so very much against divorce (even though He permits it) and considered marriage a most sacred responsibility, believers should do everything in their power to preserve the marriages they have contracted, and to make of them exemplary unions, governed by the noblest motives.

(From a letter dated 19 October 1947 to an individual believer) **[28]**

Marriage problems are often very involved and subtle, and we Bahá'ís, being enlightened and progressive people, should not hesitate, if it seems necessary or desirable, to turn to science for help in such matters. If you and your husband talked over your problems—together or separately—with a good physician you might find that you can cure your own husband, or at least try to do so. It is a great pity that two believers, united in this glorious Cause, and blessed with a family, should not be able to live together really harmoniously, and he feels you should take constructive action and not allow the situation to get worse. When the shadow of separation hangs over a husband and wife they should leave no stone unturned in their effort to avert its becoming a reality.

(From a letter dated 5 July 1949 to an individual believer) **[29]**

He advises you to, at least for a period of time, try and placate your husband by devoting yourself to him, being loving and patient. Perhaps in this way you can soften his opposition towards the Faith. However, he has no right to try and make you give it up. The relation of the individual soul towards its Creator is a purely personal and sacred one, and no one has a right to dictate in such matters.

(From a letter dated 17 February 1950 to an individual believer) **[30]**

Extracts from Letters Written by and on Behalf of the Universal House of Justice

Bahá'u'lláh came to bring unity to the world, and a fundamental unity is that of the family. Therefore, we must believe that the Faith is intended to strengthen the family, not weaken it. For

example, service to the Cause should not produce neglect of the family. It is important for you to arrange your time so that your family life is harmonious and your household receives the attention it requires.

Bahá'u'lláh also stressed the importance of consultation. We should not think this worthwhile method of seeking solutions is confined to the administrative institutions of the Cause. Family consultation employing full and frank discussion, and animated by awareness of the need for moderation and balance, can be the panacea for domestic conflict. Wives should not attempt to dominate their husbands, nor husbands their wives.

(From a letter dated 1 August 1978 written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to an individual believer) **[31]**

The Tablet of 'Abdu'l-Bahá ... which you refer to in the first paragraph of your letter is only an exhortation, not an injunction.[1] Moreover, it was revealed in honour of some Bahá'í women in Iran who must have written to 'Abdu'l-Bahá seeking guidance with regard to a specific situation. Unfortunately, the circumstances attending the revelation of the Tablet are not known, because the incoming letter or request has not come to light. The quotation should, therefore, be regarded as an exhortation which was revealed to address a specific situation. This quotation, like many others, has been included in the compilation to provide the friends with the available Writings on different aspects of family life.

The translation has been checked, and there is no doubt that the text given in English is correct.

As you say, the principle of the equality of men and women is unequivocal. The Writings on the subject are clear and unambiguous. The House of Justice has specified time and again that there are times when the husband and the wife should defer to the wishes of the other. Exactly under what circumstances such deference should take place, is a matter for each couple to determine. If, God forbid, they fail to agree, and their disagreement leads to estrangement, they should seek counsel from those they trust and in whose sincerity and sound judgement they have confidence, in order to preserve and strengthen their ties as a united family.

It is the hope of the House of Justice that the above explanation will help in alleviating your perplexities with regard to the rights of the husband and the wife in a family. However, you may wish to refer to the recently released compilation on women for further insights.

(From a letter dated 2 October 1986 written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to an individual believer) **[32]**

As you know, the principle of the oneness of mankind is described in the Bahá'í Writings as the pivot round which all the Teachings of Bahá'u'lláh revolve. It has widespread implications which affect and remould all dimensions of human activity. It calls for a fundamental change in the manner in which people relate to each other, and the eradication of those age-old practices which deny the intrinsic human right of every individual to be treated with consideration and respect.

Within the family setting, the rights of all members must be respected. 'Abdu'l-Bahá has stated:

> The integrity of the family bond must be constantly considered and the rights of the individual members must not be transgressed. The rights of the son, the father, the mother—none of them must be transgressed, none of them must be arbitrary. Just as the son has certain obligations to his father, the father, likewise, has certain obligations to his son.

> The mother, the sister and other members of the household have their certain prerogatives. All these rights and prerogatives must be conserved....

The use of force by the physically strong against the weak, as a means of imposing one's will and fulfilling one's desires, is a flagrant transgression of the Bahá'í Teachings. There can be no justification for anyone compelling another, through the use of force or through the threat of violence, to do that to which the other person is not inclined. 'Abdu'l-Bahá has written, "O ye lovers of God! In this, the cycle of Almighty God, violence and force, constraint and oppression, are one and all condemned." Let those who, driven by their passions or by their inability to exercise discipline in the control of their anger, might be tempted to inflict violence on another human being be mindful of the condemnation of such disgraceful behaviour by the Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh.

Among the signs of moral downfall in the declining social order are the high incidence of violence within the family, the increase in degrading and cruel treatment of spouses and children, and the spread of sexual abuse. It is essential that the members of the community of the Greatest Name take utmost care not to be drawn into acceptance of such practices because of their prevalence. They must be ever mindful of their obligation to exemplify a new way of life distinguished by its respect for the dignity and rights of all people, by its exalted moral tone, and by its freedom from oppression and from all forms of abuse.

Consultation has been ordained by Bahá'u'lláh as the means by which agreement is to be reached and a collective course of action defined. It is applicable to the marriage partners and within the family, and indeed, in all areas where believers participate in mutual decision making. It requires all participants to express their opinions with absolute freedom and without apprehension that they will be censured or their views belittled; these prerequisites for success are unattainable if the fear of violence or abuse is present.

A number of your questions pertain to the treatment of women, and are best considered in light of the principle of the equality of the sexes which is set forth in the Bahá'í Teachings. This principle is far more than the enunciation of admirable ideals; it has profound implications in all aspects of human relations and must be an integral element of Bahá'í domestic and community life. The application of this principle gives rise to changes in habits and practices which have prevailed for many centuries. An example of this is found in the response provided on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to a question whether the traditional practice whereby the man proposes marriage to the woman is altered by the Bahá'í Teachings to permit the woman to issue a marriage proposal to the man; the response is, "The Guardian wishes to state that there is absolute equality between the two, and that no distinction or preference is permitted...." With the passage of time, during which Bahá'í men and women endeavour to apply more fully the principle of the equality of the sexes, will come a deeper understanding of the far-reaching ramifications of this vital principle. As 'Abdu'l-Bahá has stated, "Until the reality of equality between man and woman is fully established and attained, the highest social development of mankind is not possible."

The Universal House of Justice has in recent years urged that encouragement be given to Bahá'í women and girls to participate in greater measure in the social, spiritual and administrative activities of their communities, and has appealed to Bahá'í women to arise and demonstrate the importance of their role in all fields of service to the Faith.

For a man to use force to impose his will on a woman is a serious transgression of the Bahá'í Teachings. 'Abdu'l-Bahá has stated that:

> The world in the past has been ruled by force, and man has dominated over woman by reason of his more forceful and aggressive qualities both of body and mind. But the balance is

> already shifting; force is losing its dominance, and mental alertness, intuition, and the spiritual qualities of love and service, in which woman is strong, are gaining ascendancy.

Bahá'í men have the opportunity to demonstrate to the world around them a new approach to the relationship between the sexes, where aggression and the use of force are eliminated and replaced by cooperation and consultation. The Universal House of Justice has pointed out in response to questions addressed to it that, in a marriage relationship, neither husband nor wife should ever unjustly dominate the other, and that there are times when the husband and the wife should defer to the wishes of the other, if agreement cannot be reached through consultation; each couple should determine exactly under what circumstances such deference is to take place.

From the Pen of Bahá'u'lláh Himself has come the following statement on the subject of the treatment of women:

> The friends of God must be adorned with the ornament of justice, equity, kindness and love. As they do not allow themselves to be the object of cruelty and transgression, in like manner they should not allow such tyranny to visit the handmaidens of God. He, verily, speaketh the truth and commandeth that which benefiteth His servants and handmaidens. He is the Protector of all in this world and the next.

No Bahá'í husband should ever beat his wife, or subject her to any form of cruel treatment; to do so would be an unacceptable abuse of the marriage relationship and contrary to the Teachings of Bahá'u'lláh.

The lack of spiritual values in society leads to a debasement of the attitudes which should govern the relationship between the sexes, with women being treated as no more than objects for sexual gratification and being denied the respect and courtesy to which all human beings are entitled. Bahá'u'lláh has warned: "They that follow their lusts and corrupt inclinations have erred and dissipated their efforts. They, indeed, are of the lost." Believers might well ponder the exalted standard of conduct to which they are encouraged to aspire in the statement of Bahá'u'lláh concerning His "true follower", that: "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."

One of the most heinous of sexual offences is the crime of rape. When a believer is a victim, she is entitled to the loving aid and support of the members of her community, and she is free to initiate action against the perpetrator under the law of the land should she wish to do so. If she becomes pregnant as a consequence of this assault, no pressure should be brought upon her by the Bahá'í institutions to marry. As to whether she should continue or terminate the pregnancy, it is for her to decide on the course of action she should follow, taking into consideration medical and other relevant factors, and in the light of the Bahá'í Teachings. If she gives birth to a child as a result of the rape, it is left to her discretion whether to seek financial support for the maintenance of the child from the father; however, his claim to any parental rights would, under Bahá'í law, be called into question, in view of the circumstances.

The Guardian has clarified, in letters written on his behalf, that "The Bahá'í Faith recognizes the value of the sex impulse," and that "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." In this aspect of the marital relationship, as in all others, mutual consideration and respect should apply. If a Bahá'í woman suffers abuse or is subjected to rape by her husband, she has the right to turn to the Spiritual Assembly for assistance and counsel, or to seek legal protection. Such abuse would gravely jeopardize the continuation of the marriage, and could well lead to a condition of irreconcilable antipathy.

(From a letter dated 24 January 1993 written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to an individual believer) **[33]**

In ... responding to a believer who sought a deeper understanding on the reference to the father being regarded as head of the family, a letter written on behalf of the House of Justice stated:

> As you point out in your letter, the Universal House of Justice has stated that, by inference from a number of responsibilities placed upon him, the father can be regarded as the "head" of the family. However, this term does not have the same meaning as that used generally. Rather, a new meaning should be sought in the light of the principle of the equality between men and women, and of statements of the Universal House of Justice that neither husband nor wife should ever unjustly dominate the other. The House of Justice has stated previously, in response to a question from a believer, that use of the term "head" "does not confer superiority upon the husband, nor does it give him special rights to undermine the rights of the other members of the family". It has also stated that if agreement cannot be reached following loving consultation, "there are times ... when a wife should defer to her husband, and times when a husband should defer to his wife, but neither should ever unjustly dominate the other"; this is in marked contrast to the conventional usage of the term "head" with which is associated, frequently, the unfettered right of making decisions when agreement cannot be reached between husband and wife.
>
> (From a letter dated 15 July 1993 written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to an individual believer) **[34]**

Preservation of unity between a married couple is of utmost importance, and if it is going to be undermined by service to the Cause, a solution must be found to remedy the situation.

In other words, whatever path you choose should be one that both serves the interests of the Faith and at the same time facilitates the strengthening of your marital union. You will note from the following excerpt from a letter written on behalf of the beloved Guardian that the friends are never encouraged to use serving the Faith as a reason to neglect their families:

> Surely Shoghi Effendi would like to see you and the other friends give their whole time and energy to the Cause, for we are in great need for competent workers, but the home is an institution that Bahá'u'lláh has come to strengthen and not to weaken. Many unfortunate things have happened in Bahá'í homes just for neglecting this point. Serve the Cause but also remember your duties towards your home. It is for you to find the balance and see that neither makes you neglect the other.
>
> (From a letter dated 18 April 1994 written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to an individual believer) **[35]**

...It is useful to note that the marital relationship is one that requires in many instances a profound adjustment in behaviour on the part of each partner. Because the intimacy of the relationship exposes the best and the worst in their characters, both partners are engaged in a balancing act, so to speak. Some couples are able to achieve at the outset and to maintain a high degree of harmony throughout their marriage. Many others find they must struggle for some time to attain such harmony. While it is true that the personal rights of each party to a marriage must be upheld by the other, the relationship of one to the other, it must be borne in mind, is not based solely on a legalistic premise. Love is its very foundation. This being the case, a purely litigious reaction to the misdeeds of a partner is not appropriate.

(From a letter dated 2 January 1996 written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to an individual believer) **[36]**

The issue you have raised is of vital importance to Bahá'í couples striving to address the various needs and opportunities with which they are confronted in present-day society.[2] As in so many other aspects of daily life, the resolution of this issue must be sought through the comprehension and application of the Teachings of the Faith. The believers should clearly understand and remain untroubled by the fact that the resulting solutions may well not be regarded as adequate by those not blessed with the bounty of acceptance of the Promised One and who are enmeshed in patterns of thought which are alien to the Bahá'í Teachings despite widespread acceptance of such patterns by the generality of humankind.

Central to the consideration of this matter must be the purpose in life of all faithful followers of Bahá'u'lláh: to know and worship God. This involves service to one's fellow human beings and in the advancement of the Cause of God. In pursuing this purpose, they should strive to develop their talents and faculties to whatever extent is possible by exploring the avenues before them.

It is inevitable, because of the limitations of this earthly plane, that believers will, in many instances, find themselves deprived of the opportunity to develop their talents to the fullest. This may be due to lack of economic resources or educational facilities, or to the necessity of meeting other obligations and fulfilling other duties, such as the freely chosen responsibilities associated with marriage and parenthood. In some circumstances it may be the result of a conscious decision to make sacrifices for the sake of the Cause, as when a pioneer undertakes to serve in a post which lacks the facilities for the development of his or her special skills and talents. However, such deprivations and limitations do not carry with them the implication that the Bahá'ís concerned are unable to fulfil their fundamental, divinely ordained purpose; they are simply elements of the universal challenge to evaluate and balance the many calls on one's time and effort in this life.

There is no one universally applicable response to the questions you have raised about the decisions to be made by marriage partners when both husband and wife are pursuing career opportunities which appear to be leading them along divergent paths, since circumstances vary so widely. Each couple should rely on the process of Bahá'í consultation to determine what is the best course of action. In so doing they might well consider the following factors, among others:

- the sense of equality which should inform consultation between husband and wife;

  > The Universal House of Justice has stated previously, in response to questions, that loving consultation should be the keynote of the marriage relationship. If agreement cannot be reached, there are times when either the husband or the wife should defer to the wishes of the other; exactly under what circumstances such deference should take place is a matter for each couple to decide.

- the strong emphasis placed in the Bahá'í Writings on the preservation of the marriage bond and the strengthening of the unity between the marriage partners;

  > As has been stated elsewhere by the House of Justice, this by no means implies that these functions are inflexibly fixed and cannot be changed and adjusted to suit particular family situations.

- various special circumstances which might arise, such as job prospects during a period of widespread unemployment, unusual opportunities or abilities which one marriage partner may have, or pressing needs of the Cause which a sacrificial response may be called for.

The success of such consultation will doubtless be influenced by the prayerful attitude with which it is approached, the mutual respect of the parties for each other, their earnest desire to devise a solution which will preserve unity and harmony for themselves and the other members of

their family, and their willingness to make compromises and adjustments within the context of equality.

As society evolves in the decades and centuries ahead under the transforming influence of the Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh, it will surely experience fundamental changes which will facilitate the social application of the Bahá'í Teachings, and will ease the difficulties faced by couples seeking to fulfil their ardent desire to serve the Cause of Bahá'u'lláh through their professional activities.

(From a letter dated 26 June 1996 written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to an individual believer) **[37]**

A passage from a Tablet of 'Abdu'l-Bahá ... stated "Hold thy husband dear and always show forth an amiable temper towards him, no matter how ill-tempered he may be...."[3]

In response to a question about this statement, the following clarification was provided in a Secretariat letter of 12 April 1990:

> It is clear that no husband should subject his wife to abuse of any kind, whether emotional, mental or physical. Such a reprehensible action would be the very antithesis of the relationship of mutual respect and equality enjoined by the Bahá'í writings—a relationship governed by the principles of consultation and devoid of the use of any form of abuse, including force, to compel obedience to one's will. When a Bahá'í wife finds herself in such a situation and feels it cannot be resolved through consultation with her husband, she could well turn to the Local Spiritual Assembly for advice and guidance, and might also find it highly advantageous to seek the assistance of competent professional counsellors. If the husband is also a Bahá'í, the Local Spiritual Assembly can bring to his attention the need to avoid abusive behaviour and can, if necessary, take firmer measures to compel him to conform to the admonitions of the teachings.
>
> (From a memorandum dated 20 March 2002 written by the Universal House of Justice) **[38]**

II. Parent-Child Relationships and Responsibilities

Extracts from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh

It is the bounden duty of parents to rear their children to be staunch in faith, the reason being that a child who removeth himself from the religion of God will not act in such a way as to win the good pleasure of his parents and his Lord. For every praiseworthy deed is born out of the light of religion, and lacking this supreme bestowal the child will not turn away from any evil, nor will he draw nigh unto any good.

(From a Tablet translated from the Arabic and Persian) **[39]**

And in another Tablet, these exalted words have been revealed: O Muḥammad! The Ancient of Days hath turned His countenance towards thee, making mention of thee, and exhorting the people of God to educate their children. Should a father neglect this most weighty commandment ... he shall forfeit rights of fatherhood, and be accounted guilty before God. Well is it with him who imprinteth on his heart the admonitions of the Lord, and steadfastly cleaveth unto them. God, in truth, enjoineth on His servants what shall assist and profit them, and enable them to draw nigh unto Him. He is the Ordainer, the Everlasting.

(*The Kitáb-i-Aqdas: The Most Holy Book*, Questions and Answers, number 105) **[40]**

The fruits that best befit the tree of human life are trustworthiness and godliness, truthfulness and sincerity; but greater than all, after recognition of the unity of God, praised and glorified be

He, is regard for the rights that are due to one's parents. This teaching hath been mentioned in all the Books of God, and reaffirmed by the Most Exalted Pen. Consider that which the Merciful Lord hath revealed in the Qur'án, exalted are His words: "Worship ye God, join with Him no peer or likeness; and show forth kindliness and charity towards your parents..." Observe how loving-kindness to one's parents hath been linked to recognition of the one true God! Happy they who are endued with true wisdom and understanding, who see and perceive, who read and understand, and who observe that which God hath revealed in the Holy Books of old, and in this incomparable and wondrous Tablet.

(*The Kitáb-i-Aqdas: The Most Holy Book*, Questions and Answers, number 106) **[41]**

The Pen of Glory counselleth everyone regarding the instruction and education of children. Behold that which the Will of God hath revealed upon Our arrival in the Prison City and recorded in the Most Holy Book.[4] Unto every father hath been enjoined the instruction of his son and daughter in the art of reading and writing and in all that hath been laid down in the Holy Tablet. He that putteth away that which is commanded unto him, the Trustees are then to take from him that which is required for their instruction, if he be wealthy, and if not the matter devolveth upon the House of Justice.

(*Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh Revealed after the Kitáb-i-Aqdas*, page 128) **[42]**

That which is of paramount importance for the children, that which must precede all else, is to teach them the oneness of God and the laws of God. For lacking this, the fear of God cannot be inculcated, and lacking the fear of God an infinity of odious and abominable actions will spring up, and sentiments will be uttered that transgress all bounds....

The parents must exert every effort to rear their offspring to be religious, for should the children not attain this greatest of adornments, they will not obey their parents, which in a certain sense means that they will not obey God. Indeed, such children will show no consideration to anyone, and will do exactly as they please.

(From a Tablet translated from the Arabic and Persian) **[43]**

Say, O My people! Show honour to your parents and pay homage to them. This will cause blessings to descend upon you from the clouds of the bounty of your Lord, the Exalted, the Great.

(From a Tablet translated from the Arabic) **[44]**

One of the distinguishing characteristics of this most great Dispensation is that the kin of such as have recognized and embraced the truth of this Revelation and have, in the glory of His name, the Sovereign Lord, quaffed the choice, sealed wine from the chalice of the love of the one true God, will, upon their death, if they are outwardly non-believers, be graciously invested with divine forgiveness and partake of the ocean of His Mercy.

This bounty, however, will be vouchsafed only to such souls as have inflicted no harm upon Him Who is the Sovereign Truth nor upon His loved ones. Thus hath it been ordained by Him Who is the Lord of the Throne on High and the Ruler of this world and of the world to come.

(From a Tablet translated from the Arabic and Persian) **[45]**

Extracts from the Writings and Utterances of 'Abdu'l-Bahá

O ye my two beloved children! The news of your union, as soon as it reached me, imparted infinite joy and gratitude. Praise be to God, those two faithful birds have sought shelter in one nest. I beseech God that He may enable them to raise an honoured family, for the importance of marriage lieth in the bringing up of a richly blessed family, so that with entire gladness they may,

even as candles, illuminate the world. For the enlightenment of the world dependeth upon the existence of man. If man did not exist in this world, it would have been like a tree without fruit. My hope is that you both may become even as one tree, and may, through the outpourings of the cloud of loving-kindness, acquire freshness and charm, and may blossom and yield fruit, so that your line may eternally endure.

(*Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá*, paragraph 88.1) **[46]**

Were there no educator, all souls would remain savage, and were it not for the teacher, the children would be ignorant creatures.

It is for this reason that, in this new cycle, education and training are recorded in the Book of God as obligatory and not voluntary. That is, it is enjoined upon the father and mother, as a duty, to strive with all effort to train the daughter and the son, to nurse them from the breast of knowledge and to rear them in the bosom of sciences and arts. Should they neglect this matter, they shall be held responsible and worthy of reproach in the presence of the stern Lord.

(*Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá*, paragraphs 98.1 and 98.2) **[47]**

Ye should consider the question of goodly character as of the first importance. It is incumbent upon every father and mother to counsel their children over a long period, and guide them unto those things which lead to everlasting honour.

(*Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá*, paragraph 108.1) **[48]**

Let the mothers consider that whatever concerneth the education of children is of the first importance. Let them put forth every effort in this regard, for when the bough is green and tender it will grow in whatever way ye train it. Therefore is it incumbent upon the mothers to rear their little ones even as a gardener tendeth his young plants. Let them strive by day and by night to establish within their children faith and certitude, the fear of God, the love of the Beloved of the worlds, and all good qualities and traits. Whensoever a mother seeth that her child hath done well, let her praise and applaud him and cheer his heart; and if the slightest undesirable trait should manifest itself, let her counsel the child and punish him, and use means based on reason, even a slight verbal chastisement should this be necessary. It is not, however, permissible to strike a child, or vilify him, for the child's character will be totally perverted if he be subjected to blows or verbal abuse.

(*Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá*, paragraph 95.2) **[49]**

While the children are yet in their infancy feed them from the breast of heavenly grace, foster them in the cradle of all excellence, rear them in the embrace of bounty. Give them the advantage of every useful kind of knowledge. Let them share in every new and rare and wondrous craft and art. Bring them up to work and strive, and accustom them to hardship. Teach them to dedicate their lives to matters of great import, and inspire them to undertake studies that will benefit mankind.

(*Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá*, paragraph 102.3) **[50]**

If thou wouldst show kindness and consideration to thy parents so that they may feel generally pleased, this would also please Me, for parents must be highly respected and it is essential that they should feel contented, provided they deter thee not from gaining access to the Threshold of the Almighty, nor keep thee back from walking in the way of the Kingdom. Indeed it behoveth them to encourage and spur thee on in this direction.

(From a Tablet translated from the Persian) **[51]**

Also a father and mother endure the greatest troubles and hardships for their children; and often when the children have reached the age of maturity, the parents pass on to the other world. Rarely does it happen that a father and mother in this world see the reward of the care and trouble they have undergone for their children. Therefore, children, in return for this care and trouble, must show forth charity and beneficence, and must implore pardon and forgiveness for their parents. So you ought, in return for the love and kindness shown you by your father, to give to the poor for his sake, with greatest submission and humility implore pardon and remission of sins, and ask for the supreme mercy.

(*Some Answered Questions* (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1984), pages 231 and 232) **[52]**

Regarding thy question about consultation of a father with his son, or a son with his father, in matters of trade and commerce, consultation is one of the fundamental elements of the foundation of the Law of God. Such consultation is assuredly acceptable, whether between father and son, or with others. There is nothing better than this. Man must consult in all things for this will lead him to the depths of each problem and enable him to find the right solution.

(From a Tablet translated from the Persian) **[53]**

O dear one of 'Abdu'l-Bahá! Be the son of thy father and be the fruit of that tree. Be a son that hath been born of his soul and heart and not only of water and clay. A real son is such a one as hath branched from the spiritual part of man. I ask God that thou mayest be at all times confirmed and strengthened.

(*Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá*, paragraph 117.1) **[54]**

The father must always endeavour to educate his son and to acquaint him with the heavenly teachings. He must give him advice and exhort him at all times, teach him praiseworthy conduct and character, enable him to receive training at school and to be instructed in such arts and sciences as are deemed useful and necessary. In brief, let him instil into his mind the virtues and perfections of the world of humanity. Above all he should continually call to his mind the remembrance of God so that his throbbing veins and arteries may pulsate with the love of God.

The son, on the other hand, must show forth the utmost obedience towards his father, and should conduct himself as a humble and a lowly servant. Day and night he should seek diligently to ensure the comfort and welfare of his loving father and to secure his good pleasure. He must forgo his own rest and enjoyment and constantly strive to bring gladness to the hearts of his father and mother, that thereby he may attain the good pleasure of the Almighty and be graciously aided by the hosts of the unseen.

(From a Tablet translated from the Persian) **[55]**

Among the safeguards of the Holy Faith is the training of children, and this is among the weightiest of principles in all the Divine Teachings. Thus from the very beginning mothers must rear their infants in the cradle of good morals—for it is the mothers who are the first educators—so that, when the child cometh to maturity, he will prove to be endowed with all the virtues and qualities that are worthy of praise.

And further, according to the Divine commandments, every child must learn reading and writing, and acquire such branches of knowledge as are useful and necessary, as well as learning an art or skill. The utmost care must be devoted to these matters; any neglect of them, any failure to act on them, is not permissible.

Observe how many penal institutions, houses of detention and places of torture are made ready to receive the sons of men, the purpose being to prevent them, by punitive measures, from committing terrible crimes—whereas this very torment and punishment only increaseth depravity, and by such means the desired aim cannot be properly achieved.

Therefore must the individual be trained from his infancy in such a way that he will never undertake to commit a crime, will, rather, direct all his energies to the acquisition of excellence, and will look upon the very commission of an evil deed as in itself the harshest of all punishments, considering the sinful act itself to be far more grievous than any prison sentence. For it is possible so to train the individual that, although crime may not be completely done away with, still it will become very rare.

The purport is this, that to train the character of humankind is one of the weightiest commandments of God, and the influence of such training is the same as that which the sun exerteth over tree and fruit. Children must be most carefully watched over, protected and trained; in such consisteth true parenthood and parental mercy.

Otherwise, the children will turn into weeds growing wild, and become the cursed, Infernal Tree,[5] knowing not right from wrong, distinguishing not the highest of human qualities from all that is mean and vile; they will be brought up in vainglory, and will be hated of the Forgiving Lord.

Wherefore doth every child, new-risen in the garden of Heavenly love, require the utmost training and care.

(From a Tablet translated from the Arabic and Persian) **[56]**

Extracts from Letters Written on Behalf of Shoghi Effendi

It is surely a very unfortunate case when the parents and children differ on some grave issues of life such as marriage, but the best way is not to flout each other's opinion nor to discuss it in a charged atmosphere but rather try to settle it in an amicable way.

Bahá'u'lláh definitely says that the consent of the parents should be obtained before the marriage is sanctioned and that undoubtedly has great wisdom. It will at least detain young people from marrying without considering the subject thoroughly. It is in conformity with this teaching of the Cause that Shoghi Effendi cabled that the consent of your parents should be obtained.

(From a letter dated 29 May 1929 to two believers) **[57]**

The Guardian was also made very happy to know that you have been blessed with a child whose presence, he feels certain, will contribute to the greater well-being and happiness of you both, and to the further enrichment of your Bahá'í family life. He will pray that under your loving care and guidance this dear child may grow in body, as well as in spirit, and receive such a training as will enable him, later on, to whole-heartedly embrace and serve the Cause. This is indeed your most sacred obligation as Bahá'í parents, and upon the manner and degree of its fulfilment will assuredly depend the success and happiness of your family life.

(From a letter dated 21 July 1938 to an individual believer) **[58]**

As regards your savings: the Guardian would advise you to act with moderation, and while he would certainly approve of your desire to contribute generously to the Cause, he would urge you at the same time to take into consideration your duties and responsibilities towards your parents, who, as you state, are in need of your financial assistance.

(From a letter dated 10 November 1939 to an individual believer) **[59]**

The task of bringing up a Bahá'í child, as emphasized time and again in Bahá'í writings, is the chief responsibility of the mother, whose unique privilege is indeed to create in her home such conditions as would be most conducive to both his material and spiritual welfare and advancement. The training which a child first receives through his mother constitutes the strongest foundation for his future development, and it should therefore be the paramount concern of your wife ... to endeavour from now imparting to her new-born son such spiritual training as would enable him later on to fully assume and adequately discharge all the responsibilities and duties of Bahá'í life.

(From a letter dated 16 November 1939 to an individual believer) **[60]**

With reference to the question of the training of children:[6] given the emphasis placed by Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá on the necessity for the parents to train their children while still in their tender age, it would seem preferable that they should receive their first training at home at the hand of their mother, rather than be sent to a nursery. Should circumstances, however, compel a Bahá'í mother to adopt the latter course there can be no objection.

(From a letter dated 13 November 1940 to an individual believer) **[61]**

The question of the training and education of children in case one of the parents is a non-Bahá'í is one which solely concerns the parents themselves, who should decide about it the way they find best and most conducive to the maintenance of the unity of their family, and to the future welfare of their children. Once the child comes of age, however, he should be given full freedom to choose his religion, irrespective of the wishes and desires of his parents.

(From a letter dated 14 December 1940 to a National Spiritual Assembly) **[62]**

Deep as are family ties, we must always remember that the spiritual ties are far deeper; they are everlasting and survive death, whereas physical ties, unless supported by spiritual bonds, are confined to this life. You should do all in your power, through prayer and example, to open the eyes of your family to the Bahá'í Faith, but do not grieve too much over their actions. Turn to your Bahá'í brothers and sisters who are living with you in the light of the Kingdom.

Indeed the believers have not yet fully learned to draw on each other's love for strength and consolation in time of need. The Cause of God is endowed with tremendous powers, and the reason the believers do not gain more from it is because they have not learned to fully draw on these mighty forces of love and strength and harmony generated by the Faith.

(From a letter dated 8 May 1942 to an individual believer) **[63]**

Regarding the Guardian's statement that pioneering is conditioned upon the consent of parents and that it would be necessary for them to concur, you have asked whether this ruling applies equally to children who are of age and those who are not. The Guardian's reply is that the ruling applies only to those who have not yet come of age.

(From a letter translated from the Persian dated 18 January 1943 to a National Spiritual Assembly) **[64]**

Bahá'u'lláh has clearly stated the consent of all living parents is required for a Bahá'í marriage. This applies whether the parents are Bahá'ís or non-Bahá'ís, divorced for years or not. This great law He has laid down to strengthen the social fabric, to knit closer the ties of the home, to place a certain gratitude and respect in the hearts of children for those who have given them life and sent their souls out on the eternal journey towards their Creator. We Bahá'ís must realize that in present-day society the exact opposite process is taking place: young people care less and less for their parents' wishes, divorce is considered a natural right, and obtained on the flimsiest

and most unwarrantable and shabby pretexts. People separated from each other, especially if one of them has had full custody of the children, are only too willing to belittle the importance of the partner in marriage also responsible as a parent for bringing those children into this world. The Bahá'ís must, through rigid adherence to the Bahá'í laws and teachings, combat these corrosive forces which are so rapidly destroying home life and the beauty of family relationships, and tearing down the moral structure of society.

(From a letter dated 25 October 1947 to a National Spiritual Assembly) **[65]**

Up to the age of fifteen years, children are under the direction of their parents. At the age of fifteen, they may declare their Faith as a conviction, and be registered as Bahá'í youth, whether the parents are Bahá'ís or not. Children under the age of fifteen, of Bahá'í parents, who wish to attend meetings and associate with the friends as Bahá'ís may do so. If non-Bahá'í parents permit a child of less than fifteen to attend Bahá'í meetings, and in fact, to be a Bahá'í, this is likewise permissible.

(From a letter dated 23 July 1954 to a National Spiritual Assembly) **[66]**

If the condition of the health of your parents is such that your presence is really needed, then you should not leave them. If, however, there is some other relative who could care for them, then you could help with the work in ... and aid the friends in establishing the Faith on a solid foundation there.

(From a letter dated 28 October 1955 to an individual believer) **[67]**

Extracts from Letters Written by and on Behalf of the Universal House of Justice

The Universal House of Justice has received your letter of 23 June 1977 in which you express the ardent desire of yourself and your husband to see your children grow as active supporters of the Faith, and you ask whether, in view of the responsibilities of Bahá'í parents in the pioneering field, the seeming sufferings the children bear as the result of their parents' commitments in service to the Cause will somehow be compensated. We have been asked by the Universal House of Justice to convey to you the following points.

In considering this problem it is important to bear in mind the reality of the unity of the family, and the children's part in its activities....

It should also be realized that a child, from early life, is a conscious and thinking soul, a member of his family with his own duties towards it, and is able to make his own sacrifices for the Faith in many ways. It is suggested that the children should be made to feel that they are given the privilege and opportunity of participating in the decisions as to the services their parents are able to offer, thus making their own conscious decision to accept those services with consequence for their own lives. Indeed, the children can be led to realize that it is the earnest wish of their parents to undertake such services with their children's whole-hearted support.

(From a letter dated 23 August 1977 written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to an individual believer) **[68]**

The Universal House of Justice has received your letter mailed 19 February 1982 in which you express your ardent desire to fulfil your responsibilities as a mother to guide your children aright and enable them to become firm supporters of the Cause of the Blessed Beauty. We are asked to convey to you the following points....

The House of Justice shares your concern that children from homes of devoted Bahá'í parents have left the Faith. Unfortunately there have been cases where parents have served the Cause to

the detriment of the children and the family unit....

There are many hints in the writings concerning the guidance which parents should give their children. Perhaps you have studied *A Compilation on Bahá'í Education*....

This compilation contains many references to the importance of family unity. If children are raised in homes where the family is happy and united, where thoughts and actions are directed to spiritual matters and the progress of the Cause, there is every reason to believe that the children will acquire heavenly qualities and become defenders of His Faith.

It is hoped that the above will offer assistance and reassurance and enable you to approach the duties of motherhood with joy and confidence. In parenthood, as in so many fields of endeavour, we can but do our best, aware that we shall inevitably fall short of the perfect standards towards which we strive, but confident that God will support those who labour in the path of His Faith, will answer our prayers and will make good our deficiencies.

(From a letter dated 29 March 1982 written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to an individual believer) **[69]**

The Universal House of Justice has received your letter of 14 September 1982 concerning the role of Local Spiritual Assemblies in guiding parents and children in standards of behaviour for children at community gatherings, such as Nineteen Day Feasts and Bahá'í Holy Day observances.

... The House of Justice has instructed us to say that children should be trained to understand the spiritual significance of the gatherings of the followers of the Blessed Beauty, and to appreciate the honour and bounty of being able to take part in them, whatever their outward form may be. It is realized that some Bahá'í observances are lengthy and it is difficult for very small children to remain quiet for so long. In such cases one or other of the parents may have to miss part of the meeting in order to care for the child. The Spiritual Assembly can also perhaps help the parents by providing for a children's observance, suited to their capacities, in a separate room during part of the community's observance. Attendance at the whole of the adult celebration thus becomes a sign of growing maturity and a distinction to be earned by good behaviour.

In any case, the House of Justice points out that parents are responsible for their children and should make them behave when they attend Bahá'í meetings. If children persist in creating a disturbance they should be taken out of the meeting. This is not merely necessary to ensure the properly dignified conduct of Bahá'í meetings but is an aspect of the training of children in courtesy, consideration for others, reverence, and obedience to their parents.

(From a letter dated 14 October 1982 written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to a National Spiritual Assembly) **[70]**

No detailed elaboration has been found in the Writings of the points covered in the statement by 'Abdu'l-Bahá which you quoted in your letter; the statement must be perceived in the total context of the Tablet from which it was excerpted.[7] It gives emphasis to the requisites for the training of the young from their earliest years to enable them to meet the challenges of adult life and to contribute towards maintaining the norms of a balanced, progressive society; and it underscores the serious consequences that may be normally expected if due attention is not given to such requisites. In a society wholly regulated by the laws and ordinances brought by Bahá'u'lláh it will be easier to appreciate the framework in which these requisites will produce their maximum effect.

'Abdu'l-Bahá's statement, it should be noted, refers to attempts made by others. It does not refer to the individual's own efforts to learn and refine his own character. Fortunately, there exist the repeated promises in our sacred writings of the dispensations of God's mercy which are accessible to errant souls, and we have proof from the lives of the heroes of the Faith, as well as

from those of ordinary people, of the power of one's faith in God to change behaviour. As you know, a principal purpose for the coming of the Manifestation is to transform the character of individuals and, through them, the character of society as a whole. Thus He lays down laws and ordinances which enable such a broad change to occur; the ideal end is achieved gradually through individual struggle, trial and error, and, above all, steadfast faith in God.

(From a letter dated 4 June 1984 written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to an individual believer) **[71]**

With regard to your question whether mothers should work outside the home, it is helpful to consider the matter from the perspective of the concept of a Bahá'í family. This concept is based on the principle that the man has primary responsibility for the financial support of the family, and the woman is the chief and primary educator of the children. This by no means implies that these functions are inflexibly fixed and cannot be changed and adjusted to suit particular family situations, nor does it mean that the place of the woman is confined to the home. Rather, while primary responsibility is assigned, it is anticipated that fathers would play a significant role in the education of the children and women could also be breadwinners. As you rightly indicated, 'Abdu'l-Bahá encouraged women to "participate fully and equally in the affairs of the world".

In relation to your specific queries, the decision concerning the amount of time a mother may spend in working outside the home depends on circumstances existing within the home, which may vary from time to time. Family consultation will help to provide the answers. As to the question whether courses of professional training will in future be more flexible, the House of Justice points out that future conditions will dictate such matters.

(From a letter dated 9 August 1984 written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to an individual believer) **[72]**

The seeker to whom you refer seems to have misconstrued the Bahá'í teachings about the responsibility of the parents for the education of their children. The father certainly has a very important role to play. In the Kitáb-i-Aqdas itself, Bahá'u'lláh revealed:

> Unto every father hath been enjoined the instruction of his son and daughter in the art of reading and writing and in all that hath been laid down in the Holy Tablet…. He that bringeth up his son or the son of another, it is as though he hath brought up a son of Mine; upon him rest My glory, My loving-kindness, My mercy, that have compassed the world.

The great importance attached to the mother's role derives from the fact that she is the *first* educator of the child. Her attitude, her prayers, even what she eats and her physical condition have a great influence on the child when it is still in the womb. When the child is born, it is she who has been endowed by God with the milk which is the first food designed for it, and it is intended that, if possible, she should be with the baby to train and nurture it in its earliest days and months. This does not mean that the father does not also love, pray for, and care for his baby, but as he has the primary responsibility of providing for the family, his time to be with his child is usually limited, while the mother is usually closely associated with the baby during this intensely formative time when it is growing and developing faster than it ever will again during the whole of its life. As the child grows older and more independent, the relative nature of its relationship with its mother and father modifies and the father can play a greater role.

It may be helpful to stress to your seeker that the Bahá'í principle of the equality of men and women is clearly stated in the teachings, and the fact that there is diversity of function between them in certain areas does not negate this principle.

(From a letter dated 23 August 1984 written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to two believers) **[73]**

The House of Justice recognizes full well the suffering that many women go through as single mothers, taking the entire responsibility for raising and supporting their children. The purpose of the Bahá'í Faith is to effect a fundamental transformation in the whole basis of human society, which will involve the spiritualization of mankind, the achievement of unity in human relationships and the acceptance of such vital principles as that of the equality of men and women; as a result, the stability of marriage will be enhanced, and there will be a drastic decrease in the conditions giving rise to marriage breakdowns. To attain this objective speedily, the Bahá'í community must continue to attract the spiritual powers indispensable for its success; this requires strict adherence to the principles set out in the Bahá'í teachings, with confidence that the wisdom underlying these teachings will gradually become apparent to the generality of mankind.

(From a letter dated 11 January 1988 written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to an individual believer) **[74]**

The issues you have raised[8] are best considered in the light of the Bahá'í teachings concerning family relationships. There should be a spirit of mutual respect and consideration between parents and children, in which the children turn to their parents for advice and direction, and the parents train and nurture their offspring. The fruit of this relationship is that the children grow into adulthood with their powers of discrimination and judgement refined, so that they can steer the course of their lives in a manner most conducive to their welfare.

Within the framework of this mutual respect, the parents are called upon to show wisdom and discretion when their offspring are developing friendships which might ultimately lead to marriage. They should consider carefully the circumstances under which advice should be given, and conditions under which their intervention would be construed as interference.

For their part, the offspring should recognize that their parents are deeply interested in their welfare, and that the views of the parents warrant respect and careful consideration.

As you know, the initial choice of marriage partner is made by the two individuals directly involved, and the consent of all living parents is then sought, and is required for the marriage to take place.

In this matter, as in all aspects of human relations, consultation is of great value in resolving misunderstandings and in clarifying what is the best course of behaviour in the light of the Bahá'í teachings.

(From a letter dated 25 July 1988 written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to an individual believer) **[75]**

Although the mother's part in the bringing up of the children is very great indeed, we feel that it is crucial not to underestimate the importance of the responsibility that the Writings place upon the father in this area. There is a current tendency for fathers to leave the education of children to their mothers to an entirely unjustifiable degree, and we would not wish the impression to be given that the Bahá'í teachings confirm such an attitude.

(From a memorandum dated 28 February 1989 written by Universal House of Justice) **[76]**

Teaching the Cause is undoubtedly the most meritorious of all deeds, and the friends are doubly blessed when they combine teaching with pioneering. Attending to the needs of the family is also of paramount spiritual importance, and it is not permissible to ignore the development of the family so as to serve the Faith in a particular way. Teaching the Faith and meeting the needs of the family must both be regarded as high on the scale of service to God, but the particular circumstances of a family determine the degree to which each must be dealt with. It is inevitable that the children of pioneers are called upon to share the sacrifices of their parents when they

move to a foreign field, just as the children of Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá shared Their sacrifices. But it should not be forgotten that the children also partake of the spiritual blessings and rewards of pioneering.

(From a letter dated 8 February 1990 written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to an individual believer) **[77]**

You have raised several questions about the treatment of children. It is clear from the Bahá'í Writings that a vital component of the education of children is the exercise of discipline. Shoghi Effendi has stated, in a letter written on his behalf about the education of children, that:

> Discipline of some sort, whether physical, moral or intellectual is indeed indispensable, and no training can be said to be complete and fruitful if it disregards this element. The child when born is far from being perfect. It is not only helpless, but actually is imperfect, and even is naturally inclined towards evil. He should be trained, his natural inclinations harmonized, adjusted and controlled, and if necessary suppressed or regulated, so as to ensure his healthy physical and moral development. Bahá'í parents cannot simply adopt an attitude of non-resistance towards their children, particularly those who are unruly and violent by nature. It is not even sufficient that they should pray on their behalf. Rather they should endeavour to inculcate, gently and patiently, into their youthful minds such principles of moral conduct and initiate them into the principles and teachings of the Cause with such tactful and loving care as would enable them to become "true sons of God" and develop into loyal and intelligent citizens of His Kingdom....

While the physical discipline of children is an acceptable part of their education and training, such actions are to be carried out "gently and patiently" and with "loving care", far removed from the anger and violence with which children are beaten and abused in some parts of the world. To treat children in such an abhorrent manner is a denial of their human rights, and a betrayal of the trust which the weak should have in the strong in a Bahá'í community.

It is difficult to imagine a more reprehensible perversion of human conduct than the sexual abuse of children, which finds its most debased form in incest. At a time in the fortunes of humanity when, in the words of the Guardian, "The perversion of human nature, the degradation of human conduct, the corruption and dissolution of human institutions, reveal themselves ... in their worst and most revolting aspects," and when "the voice of human conscience is stilled," when "the sense of decency and shame is obscured," the Bahá'í institutions must be uncompromising and vigilant in their commitment to the protection of the children entrusted to their care, and must not allow either threats or appeals to expediency to divert them from their duty. A parent who is aware that the marriage partner is subjecting a child to such sexual abuse should not remain silent, but must take all necessary measures, with the assistance of the Spiritual Assembly or civil authorities if necessary, to bring about an immediate cessation of such grossly immoral behaviour, and to promote healing and therapy.

Bahá'u'lláh has placed great emphasis on the duties of parents toward their children, and He has urged children to have gratitude in their hearts for their parents, whose good pleasure they should strive to win as a means of pleasing God Himself. However, He has indicated that under certain circumstances, the parents could be deprived of the right of parenthood as a consequence of their actions. The Universal House of Justice has the right to legislate on this matter. It has decided for the present that all cases should be referred to it in which the conduct or character of a parent appears to render him unworthy of having such parental rights as that of giving consent to marriage. Such questions could arise, for example, when a parent has committed incest, or when the child was conceived as a consequence of rape, and also when a parent consciously fails to protect the child from flagrant sexual abuse.

(From a letter dated 24 January 1993 written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to an individual believer) **[78]**

...Although Bahá'í children do not automatically inherit the Faith of their parents, the parents are responsible for the upbringing and spiritual welfare of their children. Bahá'í parents must therefore strive to convey to their children from their earliest days an awareness of God and love for Him, and must endeavour to guide the children into wholehearted obedience to the exhortations, ordinances and laws of Bahá'u'lláh. Among these is the recognition of and love for all the Manifestations of God, association with the followers of all religions, friendship towards all human beings, and the importance of the independent investigation of truth. It is natural, therefore, to regard the children of Bahá'ís as Bahá'í unless there is a reason to conclude the contrary. With such a basis of knowledge and understanding each child will be better equipped to think clearly and judge for himself as to what course he should follow upon reaching the age of maturity or in his adult life.

(From a letter dated 26 January 1994 written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to an individual believer) **[79]**

There are many passages in the Sacred Writings that emphasize the importance of family unity, and the great responsibility that children have toward their parents and parents toward their children. In this regard, Bahá'ís are indeed called to be obedient to their parents....

One of the most important principles of the Faith, however, is the principle of moderation in all things. Even virtues, if they are carried to excess and are not balanced by other, complementary virtues, can cause untold harm. For example, a child should not be expected to obey a parent's instruction to commit a sin. There is a danger, furthermore, in aggrandizing any single law in isolation either from the fundamental principles that underlie it or from other laws. As explained by 'Abdu'l-Bahá, the unity of the family is of critical importance, but must be balanced against the rights of each member of the family:

> According to the teachings of Bahá'u'lláh the family, being a human unit, must be educated according to the rules of sanctity. All the virtues must be taught the family. The integrity of the family bond must be constantly considered, and the rights of the individual members must not be transgressed. The rights of the son, the father, the mother—none of them must be transgressed, none of them must be arbitrary. Just as the son has certain obligations to his father, the father, likewise, has certain obligations to his son. The mother, the sister and other members of the household have their certain prerogatives. All these rights and prerogatives must be conserved, yet the unity of the family must be sustained. The injury of one shall be considered the injury of all; the comfort of each, the comfort of all; the honour of one, the honour of all.
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> (*The Promulgation of Universal Peace: Talks Delivered by 'Abdu'l-Bahá during His Visit to the United States and Canada in 1912*, Second Edition (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1982), page 168)

Another fundamental principle that should influence a Bahá'í's understanding of and approach to the requirement to be obedient to parents is the exhortation to consult in all things. According to 'Abdu'l-Bahá, consultation is, in fact, "one of the fundamental elements of the foundation of the Law of God." If, through consultation, a child and parent can deepen their understanding of each other's viewpoint and achieve unity of thought and purpose, then conflicts over obedience can be avoided.

With respect to your discussion of the relationship between obedience to parents on the one hand and individual self-expression, freedom, and spiritual growth on the other, the House of Justice suggests an alternative understanding for your consideration. Although individual persons are responsible for their own actions and spiritual development, individuals do not exist in

isolation, but as parts of families and communities. Deciding to forgo one's personal wishes in deference to one's parents—or to the institutions of the Faith, civil authorities, or the law for that matter—represents an expression of free will, not a curtailment of it. By choosing to obey, a child can contribute to unity of the family and thereby further the Cause of God.

(From a letter dated 24 September 1997 written on behalf of Universal House of Justice to an individual believer) **[80]**

Our children need to be nurtured spiritually and to be integrated into the life of the Cause. They should not be left to drift in a world so laden with moral dangers. In the current state of society, children face a cruel fate. Millions and millions in country after country are dislocated socially. Children find themselves alienated by parents and other adults whether they live in conditions of wealth or poverty. This alienation has its roots in a selfishness that is born of materialism that is at the core of the godlessness seizing the hearts of people everywhere. The social dislocation of children in our time is a sure mark of a society in decline; this condition is not, however, confined to any race, class, nation or economic condition—it cuts across them all. It grieves our hearts to realize that in so many parts of the world children are employed as soldiers, exploited as labourers, sold into virtual slavery, forced into prostitution, made the objects of pornography, abandoned by parents centred on their own desires, and subjected to other forms of victimization too numerous to mention. Many such horrors are inflicted by the parents themselves upon their own children. The spiritual and psychological damage defies estimation. Our worldwide community cannot escape the consequences of these conditions. This realization should spur us all to urgent and sustained effort in the interests of children and the future....

Children are the most precious treasure a community can possess, for in them are the promise and guarantee of the future. They bear the seeds of the character of future society which is largely shaped by what the adults constituting the community do or fail to do with respect to children. They are a trust no community can neglect with impunity. An all-embracing love of children, the manner of treating them, the quality of the attention shown them, the spirit of adult behaviour toward them—these are all among the vital aspects of the requisite attitude. Love demands discipline, the courage to accustom children to hardship, not to indulge their whims or leave them entirely to their own devices. An atmosphere needs to be maintained in which children feel that they belong to the community and share in its purpose. They must lovingly but insistently be guided to live up to Bahá'í standards, to study and teach the Cause in ways that are suited to their circumstances....

And now we wish to address a few words to parents, who bear the primary responsibility for the upbringing of their children. We appeal to them to give constant attention to the spiritual education of their children. Some parents appear to think that this is the exclusive responsibility of the community; others believe that in order to preserve the independence of children to investigate truth, the Faith should not be taught to them. Still others feel inadequate to take on such a task. None of this is correct. The beloved Master has said that "it is enjoined upon the father and mother, as a duty, to strive with all effort to train the daughter and the son," adding that, "should they neglect this matter, they shall be held responsible and worthy of reproach in the presence of the stern Lord." Independent of the level of their education, parents are in a critical position to shape the spiritual development of their children. They should not ever underestimate their capacity to mould their children's moral character. For they exercise indispensable influence through the home environment they consciously create by their love of God, their striving to adhere to His laws, their spirit of service to His Cause, their lack of fanaticism, and their freedom from the corrosive effects of backbiting. Every parent who is a believer in the Blessed Beauty has the responsibility to conduct herself or himself in such a way as to elicit the spontaneous obedience to parents to which the Teachings attach so high a value. Of course, in addition to the efforts made at home, the parents should support Bahá'í children's classes provided by the community. It must be borne in mind, too, that children live in a world that informs them of harsh

realities through direct experience with the horrors already described or through the unavoidable outpourings of the mass media. Many of them are thereby forced to mature prematurely, and among these are those who look for standards and discipline by which to guide their lives. Against this gloomy backdrop of a decadent society, Bahá'í children should shine as the emblems of a better future.

(From the Riḍván 2000 message of the Universal House of Justice to the Bahá'ís of the world) **[81]**

III. Enhancing Family Life

Extracts from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh

Blessed is the house that hath attained unto My tender mercy, wherein My remembrance is celebrated, and which is ennobled by the presence of My loved ones, who have proclaimed My praise, cleaved fast to the cord of My grace and been honoured by chanting My verses. Verily they are the exalted servants whom God hath extolled in the Qayyúmu'l-Asmá' and other scriptures. Verily He is the All-Hearing, the Answerer, He Who perceiveth all things.

(From a Tablet translated from the Arabic) **[82]**

The beginning of magnanimity is when man expendeth his wealth on himself, on his family and on the poor among his brethren in his Faith.

The essence of wealth is love for Me; whoso loveth Me is the possessor of all things, and he that loveth Me not is indeed of the poor and needy. This is that which the Finger of Glory and Splendour hath revealed.

(*Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh Revealed after the Kitáb-i-Aqdas*, page 156) **[83]**

There can be no doubt that whatsoever hath been revealed from the All-Glorious Pen, be it ordinances or prohibitions, conferreth benefits upon the believers themselves. For example, among the commandments is that of the Ḥuqúqu'lláh. If the people attain the privilege of paying the Ḥuqúq, the one true God—exalted be His glory—will of a certainty confer blessing upon them. Moreover, such payment will enable them and their offspring to benefit from their possessions. As thou dost observe, large portions of people's wealth are lost to them as God causeth strangers, or heirs in comparison with whom strangers would have been preferable, to lay hands on their possessions.

God's consummate wisdom is far beyond any description or fitting mention. Verily, people see with their own eyes and yet deny; they are aware, yet they pretend not to know. Had they observed the ordinance of God they would have attained the good of this world and the next.

(From a Tablet translated from the Arabic and Persian) **[84]**

Extracts from the Writings and Utterances of 'Abdu'l-Bahá

I beseech God to graciously make of thy home a centre for the diffusion of the light of divine guidance, for the dissemination of the Words of God and for enkindling at all times the fire of love in the hearts of His faithful servants and maidservants. Know thou of a certainty that every house wherein the anthem of praise is raised to the Realm of Glory in celebration of the Name of God is indeed a heavenly home, and one of the gardens of delight in the Paradise of God.

(From a Tablet translated from the Arabic) **[85]**

If love and agreement are manifest in a single family, that family will advance, become illumined and spiritual; but if enmity and hatred exist within it, destruction and dispersion are

inevitable.

(*The Promulgation of Universal Peace: Talks Delivered by 'Abdu'l-Bahá during His Visit to the United States and Canada in 1912*, pages 144 and 145) **[86]**

Compare the nations of the world to the members of a family. A family is a nation in miniature. Simply enlarge the circle of the household, and you have the nation. Enlarge the circle of nations, and you have all humanity. The conditions surrounding the family surround the nation. The happenings in the family are the happenings in the life of the nation. Would it add to the progress and advancement of a family if dissensions should arise among its members, all fighting, pillaging each other, jealous and revengeful of injury, seeking selfish advantage? Nay, this would be the cause of the effacement of progress and advancement. So it is in the great family of nations, for nations are but an aggregate of families. Therefore, as strife and dissension destroy a family and prevent its progress, so nations are destroyed and advancement hindered.

(*The Promulgation of Universal Peace: Talks Delivered by 'Abdu'l-Bahá during His Visit to the United States and Canada in 1912*, page 157) **[87]**

Treat all thy friends and relatives, even strangers, with a spirit of utmost love and kindliness.

(From a Tablet translated from the Persian) **[88]**

Be thou not unhappy; the tempest of sorrow shall pass; regret will not last; disappointment will vanish; the fire of the love of God will become enkindled, and the thorns and briars of sadness and despondency will be consumed! Be thou happy; rest thou assured upon the favours of Bahá, so that uncertainty and hesitation may become non-existent and the invisible outpourings descend upon the arena of being!...

If the friends and relatives are keeping themselves at a distance from thee, be thou not sad, for God is near to thee. Associate thou, as much as thou canst, with the relatives and strangers; display thou loving kindness; show thou forth the utmost patience and resignation. The more they oppose thee, shower thou upon them the greater justice and equity; the more they show hatred and opposition toward thee, challenge thou them with great truthfulness, friendship and reconciliation.

(*Tablets of Abdul-Baha Abbas* (New York: Bahá'í Publishing Committee), volume III, pages 557 and 558) **[89]**

O ye kind brothers who tread the path of God! Render thanks to Him that ye have combined both physical and spiritual brotherhood, that your inner reality hath become even as the outer, and that your outer reality hath come to express the inner. The sweetness of this brotherhood regaleth the soul and the savour of this kinship delighteth the heart. Praise ye God that, even as thankful birds, ye have built your nests in His gardens. And so will ye nestle together hereafter, in the rose-garden of the All-Merciful in the Abhá Kingdom, upon the branches of the divine Lote-Tree. For ye are birds of the meadow of guidance and the nightingales of the bower of bounty. What a stupendous grace, what a mighty bestowal is this! Render thanks, then, unto God for this abounding grace and glorious attainment.

(From a Tablet translated from the Persian) **[90]**

Diffuse the glad-tidings of the Kingdom far and wide to the ears, promulgate the Word of God, and put into practice the advices and covenants of God; that is, arise ye with such qualities and attributes that ye may continually bestow life to the body of the world, and nurse the infants of the universe up to the station of maturity and perfection. Enkindle with all your might in every meeting the light of the love of God, gladden and cheer every heart with the utmost loving-kindness, show forth your love to the strangers just as you show forth to your relations. If a soul is

seeking to quarrel, ask ye for reconciliation; if he blame ye, praise [him]; if he give you a deadly poison, bestow ye an all-healing antidote; if he createth death, administer ye eternal life; if he becometh a thorn, change ye into roses and hyacinths. Perchance, through such deeds and words, this darkened world will become illuminated, this terrestrial universe will become transformed into a heavenly realm, and this satanic prison become a divine court; warfare and bloodshed be annihilated, and love and faithfulness hoist the tent of unity upon the apex of the world.

(*Tablets of Abdul-Baha Abbas*, volume III, pages 503 and 504) **[91]**

Every imperfect soul is self-centred and thinketh only of his own good. But as his thoughts expand a little he will begin to think of the welfare and comfort of his family. If his ideas still more widen, his concern will be the felicity of his fellow citizens; and if still they widen, he will be thinking of the glory of his land and of his race. But when ideas and views reach the utmost degree of expansion and attain the stage of perfection, then will he be interested in the exaltation of humankind. He will then be the well-wisher of all men and the seeker of the weal and prosperity of all lands. This is indicative of perfection.

(*Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá*, paragraph 34.2) **[92]**

O Lord! In this Most Great Dispensation Thou dost accept the intercession of children in behalf of their parents. This is one of the special infinite bestowals of this Dispensation. Therefore, O Thou kind Lord, accept the request of this Thy servant at the threshold of Thy singleness and submerge his father in the ocean of Thy grace, because this son hath arisen to render Thee service and is exerting effort at all times in the pathway of Thy love. Verily, Thou art the Giver, the Forgiver and the Kind!

(*Bahá'í Prayers: A Selection of Prayers Revealed by Bahá'u'lláh, the Báb, and 'Abdu'l-Bahá*, page 64) **[93]**

O handmaids of the Merciful! Render ye thanks unto the Ancient Beauty that ye have been raised up and gathered together in this mightiest of centuries, this most illumined of ages. As befitting thanks for such a bounty, stand ye staunch and strong in the Covenant and, following the precepts of God and the holy Law, suckle your children from their infancy with the milk of a universal education, and rear them so that from their earliest days, within their inmost heart, their very nature, a way of life will be firmly established that will conform to the divine Teachings in all things.

For mothers are the first educators, the first mentors; and truly it is the mothers who determine the happiness, the future greatness, the courteous ways and learning and judgement, the understanding and the faith of their little ones.

(*Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá*, paragraphs 96.1 and 96.2) **[94]**

O thou who hast newly blossomed in the bower of God's love! Render thanks unto Him that thou hast come into being from the seed of His loved ones, hast been nursed at the breast of His love and art being reared in the bosom of His knowledge. It is my ardent wish that thou mayest nurture the hopes of thy mother and thy father, grow cypress-tall in the garden of their earnest desires, become the sweet and tender fruit of the tree of their aspirations, engage in service to the Word of God, and bring honour and glory to His Cause.

(From a Tablet translated from the Persian) **[95]**

Extracts from Letters Written on Behalf of Shoghi Effendi

A truly Bahá'í home is a true fortress upon which the Cause can rely while planning its campaigns. If ... and ... love each other and would like to marry, Shoghi Effendi does not wish them

to think that by doing so they are depriving themselves of the privilege of service; in fact such a union will enhance their ability to serve. There is nothing more beautiful than to have young Bahá'ís marry and found truly Bahá'í homes, the type Bahá'u'lláh wishes them to be.

(From a letter dated 6 November 1932 to an individual believer) **[96]**

He was deeply grieved to learn of your family difficulties, of your troubles and anxieties, and he would like you not to lose heart, to be patient and confident in the unfailing guidance and help of the Almighty. We have all our petty material obstacles in this life. We cannot totally get rid of them. The best thing to do, after all our efforts have failed to deliver us, is to concentrate on that which can alone bring real happiness and peace to our heart. And you should be thankful to God for having enabled you to recognize and accept His Faith. For this is, assuredly, the only source of joy and consolation you can have in your moments of suffering. Is there anything more worthwhile to work for than the teaching of the Message? This is the Guardian's advice to you. He wishes you to forget, as far as you can, your material difficulties and to fully concentrate on the study and the spread of the Teachings. You have the interest, the zeal, the devotion and the ability that are required, and it would be a pity if you should fail to make full use of these remarkable qualities.

(From a letter dated 4 October 1933 to an individual believer) **[97]**

The Guardian wishes me specially to urge you to remain patient and confident, and above all to show your husband the utmost kindness and love, in return for all the opposition and hatred you receive from him. A conciliatory and friendly attitude in such cases is not only the duty of every Bahá'í but is also the most effective way of winning for the Cause the sympathy and admiration of its former foes and enemies. Love is, indeed, a most potent elixir that can transform the vilest and meanest of people into heavenly souls. May your example serve to further confirm the truth of this beautiful teaching of our Faith.

(From a letter dated 6 December 1935 to an individual believer) **[98]**

The Guardian's message to you is that you should constantly strive to mirror forth in your private lives, and also in your social relationships, the beauty, purity and regenerative power of the Message of Bahá'u'lláh. The Bahá'í youth of today should be an example to the youth of the world, and should therefore live up to the highest standards of conduct. Nothing short of such a close, united and concrete adherence to the ideals and teachings of the Faith by every young Bahá'í man and woman can impress and attract to it the serious attention and consideration of the world outside.

(From a letter dated 17 March 1937 to a Bahá'í youth group) **[99]**

The condition you have described prevailing in your family, particularly as it is so seriously affecting your brothers and sisters, is certainly most sad, but while there are certain elements in the situation which you feel powerless to overcome, you should not give up every hope of ameliorating your condition, no matter how gradually. A purely passive attitude can only result in causing you fresh disappointments. You should therefore take courage, and as much as your means and circumstances permit confidently and persistently endeavour to remedy your family condition.

(From a letter dated 20 February 1940 to an individual believer) **[100]**

He was sorry to hear that ... is in an unhappy state of mind. She should certainly not grieve if she finds that her family are not receptive to the Teachings—for not every soul is spiritually enlightened. Indeed, many members of the families of the Prophets Themselves have remained unconverted even in face of the example and persuasion of the Manifestation of God; therefore, the friends should not be distressed by such things but rather leave the future of those they love

in the hand of God, and by their services and devotion to the Faith, win the right to plead for their ultimate spiritual rebirth.

(From a letter dated 9 March 1942 to an individual believer) **[101]**

A marriage between two souls, alive to the Message of God in this day, dedicated to the service of His Cause, working for the good of humanity, can be a potent force in the lives of others and an example and inspiration to other Bahá'ís, as well as to non-believers.

(From a letter dated 4 August 1943 to two believers) **[102]**

The Guardian deeply regrets the hostile attitude of some members of your family towards the Cause you have arisen to serve, and he feels that you should do everything in your power to avoid antagonizing them—short, of course, of giving up your Faith and becoming inactive in it.

As you cannot induce them to be interested in it, the best thing to do is what the Master always advised in such cases: leave them to themselves, and pray for them. The Guardian, you may be sure, will also pray for their illumination. Many people have, after bitterly opposing the Faith, been eventually won over by the patience, love, tact and prayers of their Bahá'í relative or friend.

(From a letter dated 14 October 1943 to an individual believer) **[103]**

He feels you should by all means show your husband the greatest love and sympathy; if we are ever in any doubt as to how we should conduct ourselves as Bahá'ís we should think of 'Abdu'l-Bahá and study His life and ask ourselves what would He have done, for He is our perfect example in every way. And you know how tender He was, and how His affection and kindness shone like sunlight on everyone.

Your husband and your child have a right to your love, and give you a wonderful opportunity of demonstrating your faith in the Cause.

Also you should pray to Bahá'u'lláh to help unite you with your husband and make your home a true and happy home.

(From a letter dated 9 March 1946 to an individual believer) **[104]**

He feels, in regard to your family problems, that you should take these matters up with your Assembly, if you desire advice; one of the duties of these Assemblies is to advise and aid the friends, and it is your privilege to turn to your Assembly.

(From a letter dated 10 April 1947 to a Bahá'í couple) **[105]**

The Guardian has long felt that the ... Bahá'ís are not, in some cases, living up to the ideal of marriage set forth by Bahá'u'lláh. They are prone to being influenced by the current light and selfish attitude of the people towards the marriage bond. Consequently when he sees you are successfully living up to the Bahá'í standard, putting your best into it and preserving this sacred tie you have with your husband, he is very happy indeed. He hopes you will be in a position to be an example to others. For he disapproves of the way some Bahá'ís, in the name of serving the Cause, disencumber themselves of their husbands, or go and get new ones!

(From a letter dated 2 April 1950 to an individual believer) **[106]**

The Guardian will pray that your mother may become a Bahá'í, and very actively serve the Cause of God. It should be borne in mind that by your leading a consecrated Bahá'í life, your mother will be affected perhaps as much or more than by reading and studying. When one sees the effect of the Bahá'í Teachings on another person's life, that very often has a very great effect.

(From a letter dated 12 July 1952 to an individual believer) **[107]**

The fulfilment of our personal ambitions in life is very seldom what brings us happiness. On the contrary, it usually arouses an entire group of new ambitions. On the other hand, when we immerse ourselves in our duties both as human beings, to our families and our associates, and as Bahá'ís toward the Cause of God and serving it to the best of our ability in the circumstances in which we find ourselves, we begin to know what happiness means.

(From a letter dated 23 May 1956 to an individual believer) **[108]**

The Guardian will pray for you, your children, and your dear husband. Now that you all are united in the Faith of God, and work happily together, surely the divine benedictions will reach you, and the confirmations of the Holy Spirit bless your work. The magnet which attracts the Holy Spirit is service in the Cause of God, and particularly teaching His glorious Faith. The Guardian will pray that each and every member of your family will be a brilliant star in the firmament of God's good pleasure. Study of the Word, Meditation on its divine import, prayer, and then action are necessary. And then, perseverance in action. If these steps are followed, one will develop spiritually, and be victorious in service to the Cause of God.

(From a letter dated 5 June 1956 to an individual believer) **[109]**

You should create in your home with your family such a spirit of Bahá'í love as will bring your wife truly into the Faith and attract your children to it.... To have harmony in the home is the most important thing for your children.

(From a letter dated 15 August 1957 to an individual believer) **[110]**

Extracts from Letters Written by and on Behalf of the Universal House of Justice

Among the more salient objectives to be attained by the Local Spiritual Assembly in its process of development to full maturity are to act as a loving shepherd to the Bahá'í flock, promote unity and concord among the friends, direct the teaching work, protect the Cause of God, arrange for Feasts, Anniversaries and regular meetings of the community, familiarize the Bahá'ís with its plans, invite the community to offer its recommendations, promote the welfare of youth and children, and participate, as circumstances permit, in humanitarian activities. In its relationship to the individual believer, the Assembly should continuously invite and encourage him to study the Faith, to deliver its glorious message, to live in accordance with its teachings, to contribute freely and regularly to the Fund, to participate in community activities, and to seek refuge in the Assembly for advice and help, when needed.

(From a letter dated 30 July 1972 written by the Universal House of Justice to a National Spiritual Assembly) **[111]**

As you well know, Bahá'u'lláh has stated: "Ḥuqúqu'lláh is indeed a great law. It is incumbent upon all to make this offering, because it is the source of grace, abundance, and of all good. It is a bounty which shall remain with every soul in every world of the worlds of God, the All-Possessing, the All-Bountiful." The devoted believer who is privileged to pay "the right of God", far from seeking excuses for evading this spiritual obligation, will do his utmost to meet it. On the other hand, inasmuch as obedience to this Law is a matter of conscience, and payment of Ḥuqúqu'lláh is a voluntary act, it would not be seemly to go beyond informing the ... friends of their spiritual obligation, and leaving to them to decide what they wish to do about it.

The same principle applies to those friends who spend lavishly on their families, who purchase or build residences and furnish them far in excess of their needs, and rationalize these expenditures in their desire to avoid payment of Ḥuqúqu'lláh.

(From a letter dated 26 February 1973 written by the Universal House of Justice to an individual believer) **[112]**

The proper education of children is of vital importance to the progress of mankind, and the heart and essential foundation of all education is spiritual and moral training. When we teach our fellow-men the truths and way of life of the Bahá'í Faith we have to struggle against barriers of indifference, materialism, superstition and a multitude of erroneous preconceptions; but in our new-born children we are presented with pure souls, untarnished by the world. As they grow they will face countless tests and difficulties. From their earliest moments we have the duty to train them, both spiritually and materially, in the way that God has shown, and thus, as they come to adulthood, they can become champions of His Cause and spiritual and moral giants among mankind, equipped to meet all tests, and will be, indeed, "stars of the heaven of understanding", "soft-flowing waters upon which must depend the very life of all men."

(From a letter dated 31 August 1976 written by the Universal House of Justice to all National Spiritual Assemblies) **[113]**

Noting that you and your husband have consulted about your family problems with your Spiritual Assembly but did not receive any advice, and also discussed your situation with a family counsellor without success, the House of Justice feels it most essential for your husband and you to understand that marriage can be a source of well-being, conveying a sense of security and spiritual happiness. However, it is not something that just happens. For marriage to become a haven of contentment it requires the cooperation of the marriage partners themselves, and the assistance of their families.

(From a letter dated 24 June 1979 written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to an individual believer) **[114]**

The Bahá'í concept of the role of women in society is unique. In contrast to the present tendency to devalue motherhood, the Faith affirms that this function is highly responsible and is of vital importance to the sound development of the new generation and thus, to the creation and maintenance of an ever-advancing civilization. The assignment of the primary responsibility for education of children to the mother derives directly from the fact that she is bearer of the baby. Her attitude, her prayers, even what she eats and her physical condition have a great influence on the child when it is still in the womb....

However, the Bahá'í Teachings do not call for women to be confined to the home and do not require them to be occupied solely with their domestic functions. Some indication of the role envisaged for women in the Bahá'í Dispensation is provided in the statements of 'Abdu'l-Bahá that "women must advance and fulfil their mission in all departments of life, becoming equal to men", and that

> In the Dispensation of Bahá'u'lláh, women are advancing side by side with men. There is no area or instance where they will lag behind: they have equal rights with men, and will enter, in the future, into all branches of the administration of society. Such will be their elevation that, in every area of endeavour, they will occupy the highest levels in the human world. Rest thou assured. Look not upon their present state. In future, the world of womankind will shine with lustrous brilliance, for such is the will and purpose of Bahá'u'lláh.

(From a letter dated 4 August 1992 written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to an individual believer) **[115]**

... The Teachings of the Faith are quite clear on the necessity for attention to the education of children and the fostering of family life. The problem to which you have called attention arises when believers are confronted with insistent calls for assistance in the promotion of the Faith, in

the administrative activities of the Bahá'í community, and in the consolidation work. Their challenge is to decide how to respond to these calls without neglect of their responsibilities to children and other family members, having regard to the limitations of time, energy and resources with which all Bahá'ís are confronted.

There is no single correct approach to meeting this challenge, since individual circumstances vary so greatly. However, it is clear that Bahá'ís should strive for balance, in which the legitimate needs of children and family are considered, together with the needs of the external Bahá'í community and its growth. As the family develops, a conscious effort should be made to draw all of its members into the work of the Faith in such manner that the children identify with it and do not resent the involvement of the parents; this should come about through a process of encouragement and nurturing, and the motivation of the family members sustained through family consultation.

(From a letter dated 20 September 1992 written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to an individual believer) **[116]**

Your questions all pertain to the vital issue of the Bahá'í education of children. The House of Justice regards it as being of the utmost importance that Bahá'í parents strive to assist their children to make a sustained and systematic study of the Teachings, to spiritualize their lives, and to form their characters in accordance with the standards of Bahá'u'lláh. Success in the fulfilment of these vital duties on the part of the parents will lessen the danger of their children's being caught up in the destructive forces which are a distinguishing feature of a declining social order sorely in need of regeneration, and of their being deprived of the healing grace of Bahá'u'lláh.

(From a letter dated 2 July 1995 written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to an individual believer) **[117]**

Protecting children from the immoral influences of present-day society stands as one of the mighty challenges facing Bahá'í parents. Your expression of concern about the effect which media, especially television programmes, has on children, has been sympathetically noted. As you well know, there is no practical way children can be shielded entirely from the moral problems of the society in which they are growing up. It therefore devolves upon parents to do all they can to ensure that their children receive spiritual education from their earliest years, both through Bahá'í classes sponsored by institutions of the Faith and through the moral instruction and example they receive at home. The published compilation on Bahá'í education offers many useful guidelines.

Since it is impossible for Bahá'í children to avoid exposure to unsavoury behaviour, it becomes important that the encounters that children may have with such behaviour through the media and in daily life be used wisely by parents as a means of guiding and assisting them to appreciate the practical as well as spiritual importance of being different. The extent to which you seek to reduce your child's exposure to such influences is left to your best judgement in the light of the Teachings.

(From a letter dated 4 September 2001 written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to a Bahá'í couple) **[118]**

The House of Justice is moved to learn of your love for the Blessed Beauty and your ardent desire to serve His Cause and win His good pleasure. There are many ways in which one can serve, and each person has to choose what he or she can do best within his or her possibilities and limits. Opportunities to serve the Cause do not necessarily exclude the possibility of rendering assistance to one's family. It is important to note that every aspect of a person's life is an element of service to Bahá'u'lláh: the love and respect one has for one's parents; the pursuit of one's education; the nurturing of good health; the acquisition of a trade or profession; one's behaviour toward others and the upholding of a high moral standard; one's marriage and the rearing of one's

children; one's activities in teaching the Faith and in building up the strength of the Bahá'í community; and, of course, one's daily prayer and study of the Writings.

(From a letter dated 22 September 2002 written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to an individual believer) **[119]**

Regarding the question of whether you must seek the consent of your parents to marry, there are certain rare circumstances which can render this requirement inoperable in the case of one or both of the parents: if the parent has died; if he or she is certifiably insane and thus unable to give a legal decision; if he or she is untraceable; if he or she has disowned or officially relinquished responsibility for the child; if he or she has seriously abused the child. Cases of the last two types cover such a wide range of situations that they usually have to be referred to the House of Justice for consideration on a case-by-case basis.

(From a letter dated 19 December 2006 written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to an individual believer) **[120]**

You are concerned about the application of this principle[9] in relation to the training of children and youth and ask whether it would be acceptable for your child to choose not to be a Bahá'í. A way of understanding the purpose of independent investigation of truth in this context is to recognize the fairness of leaving individuals free to decide for themselves on the basis of their own enquiry and inner conviction what they will believe and of not imposing on them any obligation to accept automatically what their parents or others believe. It means, too, that the mature individual must take responsibility for deciding to what system of belief he will commit himself. Children who have been reared in the knowledge of the Faith by Bahá'í parents will know from the very character of the instruction they have received that they must exercise that responsibility personally for themselves. This point is made clear in Shoghi Effendi's advice, as conveyed in a letter written on his behalf to a National Spiritual Assembly: "Once the child comes of age ... he should be given full freedom to choose his religion, irrespective of the wishes and desires of his parents."

Nonetheless, children need moral training from an early age to enable them at least to develop well in their social interaction with others. A common core of moral instruction can be found in all revealed scriptures, and it is appropriate, indeed necessary, for Bahá'í parents to abide by their own principles in guiding their children towards becoming spiritual beings and decent, upstanding members of society. Bahá'u'lláh has, after all, given each of His followers the duty to teach His Cause, describing it as the most meritorious of all deeds. It would truly be strange if, knowing this, a Bahá'í mother were to keep from her child what she is teaching to everyone else about the latest Revelation from God. Moreover, He has bidden parents to offer their children spiritual instruction from an early age, but to do so in a manner that does not conduce to fanaticism.

Left entirely on their own to find their way through life, children encounter dim prospects, as the deplorable situation with young people in present-day society so glaringly demonstrates. Among the things to be inculcated in children so as to prepare them for the future is the virtue of justice, which underscores the importance of one's seeing with one's own eyes and for one's own self—the importance, in other words, of independent investigation. Without some form of training or orientation one cannot investigate truth. This is so for a scientist who would hardly be able to discover material reality without preparation by some form of training. The open attitude of the Faith to learning should encourage confidence in the friends that they are being endowed with the ability to develop searching minds. The more they study the Teachings the more is this ability awakened and increased.

(From a letter dated 31 July 2007 written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to an individual believer) **[121]**

Notes

1 The believer enquired about the reference to the statement concerning a wife's "obedience to and consideration for her husband" in the text of the following Tablet revealed by 'Abdu'l-Bahá:

> O Handmaids of the All-Sufficing God!
>
> Exert yourselves, that haply ye may be enabled to acquire such virtues as shall honour and distinguish you amongst all women. Of a surety, there is no greater pride and glory for a woman than to be a handmaid in God's Court of Grandeur; and the qualities that shall merit her this station are an alert and wakeful heart; a firm conviction of the unity of God, the Peerless; a heartfelt love for all His maidservants; spotless purity and chastity; obedience to and consideration for her husband; attention to the education and nurturing of her children; composure, calmness, dignity and self-possession; diligence in praising God, and worshipping Him both night and day; constancy and firmness in His holy Covenant; and the utmost ardour, enthusiasm, and attachment to His Cause. I pray God that each and every one of these bestowals may be conferred upon you.

↩

2 The believer enquired about the decisions to be made by marriage partners when both husband and wife are pursuing career opportunities which appear to be leading them along divergent paths. ↩

3 The text of the Tablet reads as follows:

> Hold thy husband dear and always show forth an amiable temper towards him, no matter how ill-tempered he may be. Even if thy loving-kindness maketh him more bitter, manifest thou more kindliness, more tenderness, be more loving and tolerate his annoying and offensive behaviour.

↩

4 The Kitáb-i-Aqdas ↩

5 The Zaqqúm, Qur'án 37:62, 44:43 ↩

6 The incoming letter to the Guardian states:

> Another question, regarding the education of children, has arisen. A few of us who are expecting babies are anticipating placing our older children (2½ to 3 years) in ... Nursery School which is an excellent school, known throughout the country for its fine child guidance methods, since we felt we would be inadequate parents for a number of months, and because there are no playmates of these children's ages in our vicinity. The great objection seems to be that, according to the Writings, the mother is the most important teacher until the child is 6 or 7 years old. Naturally, we wish to do what is best and would appreciate your help.

↩

7 The statement of 'Abdu'l-Bahá is as follows: "It is extremely difficult to teach the individual and refine his character once puberty is passed." See *Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá*, paragraph 111.7. ↩

8 Concerning parental consent ↩

9 The independent investigation of truth ↩

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