To Set the World in Order: Building and Preserving Strong Marriages

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The Cause of Unity
Creating Families that Illuminate the World
The Ideal Milieu for Learning the Principles of Consultation
Addressing Challenges
Prayers

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The Cause of Unity

And then the voice of the Divine Lote-Tree sounded, calling aloud and saying: "Praise be unto God Who hath ordained marriage to be a portal for the appearance of the manifestations of His Name, the All-Merciful, and adorned by its means the cities of His mention and praise." Verily, it is the key to the perpetuation of life for the peoples of the world, and the inscrutable instrument for the fulfilment of their destiny. Through it the water of life hath streamed forth unto the people of certitude. Praised be God, Who hath made marriage a means for propagating His Cause amongst His servants and proclaiming His Word throughout the world....

All loving-kindness is Thine, O Thou Who art the Object of the adoration of all humankind, inasmuch as Thou hast ordained marriage to be a cause of unity amongst Thy creatures and of the exaltation of Thy Word amidst Thy people. Through its agency, Thou hast bound together the hearts and revealed the manifestations of Thy Name, the Best-Beloved. By its means, the hidden mysteries have been disclosed from behind the mount of Thy power, and earth and heaven have been illumined with the light of Thy loving-kindness.

(Bahá'u'lláh, from a Tablet—translated from the Arabic) **[1]**

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.

In the same way, when any souls grow to be true believers, they will attain a spiritual relationship with one another, and show forth a tenderness which is not of this world. They will, all of them, become elated from a draught of divine love, and that union of theirs, that connection, will also abide forever. Souls, that is, who will consign their own selves to oblivion, strip from themselves the defects of humankind, and unchain themselves from human bondage, will beyond any doubt be illumined with the heavenly splendours of oneness, and will all attain unto real union in the world that dieth not.

('Abdu'l-Bahá, *Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá*, pars. 84.2–84.5) **[2]**

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.

('Abdu'l-Bahá, *Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá*, pars. 86.1–86.2) **[3]**

With all humility, prayers of supplication have been offered at the Holy Threshold, that this marriage may be a harbinger of joy to the friends, that it may be a loving bond for all eternity, and yield everlasting benefits and fruits.

From separation doth every kind of hurt and harm proceed, but the union of created things doth ever yield most laudable results. From the pairing of even the smallest particles in the world of being are the grace and bounty of God made manifest; and the higher the degree, the more momentous is the union. "Glory be to Him Who hath created all the pairs, of such things as earth produceth, and out of men themselves, and of things beyond their ken."[1] And above all other unions is that between human beings, especially when it cometh to pass in the love of God. Thus is the primal oneness made to appear; thus is laid the foundation of love in the spirit. It is certain that such a marriage as yours will cause the bestowals of God to be revealed. Wherefore do we offer you felicitations and call down blessings upon you and beg of the Blessed Beauty, through His aid and favour, to make that wedding feast a joy to all and adorn it with the harmony of Heaven.

('Abdu'l-Bahá, *Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá*, pars. 87.1–87.2) **[4]**

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.

('Abdu'l-Bahá, *Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá*, pars. 92.1–92.3) **[5]**

He is God.

All praise be unto God, Who hath created realities that are paired through the mutual encounter of the divine names and attributes, that are comprised of both existence and essence, and that derive their grace from states that are opposite yet compatible and from facing mirrors that form complementary reflections. "Glory be to Him Who hath created all the pairs, of such things as the earth produceth, and of themselves, and of things beyond their ken",[2] and hath made the human reality to be a wellspring of blessings and a fountainhead of abundant increase in the world of being. The inner realities of all things proceeded from the encounter of the most excellent names, and the contest of the most exalted attributes. They married, assembled, gathered, harmonized, united, and attained unto completion and perfection—whereupon, within the essences of the realities derived therefrom, the effulgence of primal oneness shone resplendent.

Within these mysteries lieth an inscrutable wisdom—a wisdom through which God's laws and ordinances have been revealed in the Sacred Scriptures. Unto God belongeth supreme authority, irrefutable proofs, all-swaying sovereignty, consummate might, and all-encompassing powers of attraction.

Blessing and praise rest upon that Reality that joineth together the spiritual realities and subtle particulars of the universe—that mighty Bridge, that all-bountiful Link, that Confluence of the two seas and Meeting-Place of the two shores, that Day-Star of the "two Easts" and Light of the "two Wests"[3]—upon that Blessed Tree and its branches, its leaves, its blossoms, and its fruits, and upon all those who have sought shelter within its shade and taken refuge beneath its outspread boughs.

Verily, the All-Merciful One shed His splendour upon the Sinai of creation with a light that gleamed, flashed, and beamed upon the dawning-places of the souls and the horizons of the world. Thereupon did all potentialities and their recipients, and all existences and essences, unite and join together in affection, intimacy, and mutual attraction. Through this union, the sign of Divine Oneness appeared, the standard of His Singleness was hoisted, all multiplicity disappeared, all selfishness vanished into nothingness, and every dividing boundary did fade away.

And so that this primal oneness may be expressed and this spiritual harmony be manifested, He, through His consummate wisdom and all-encompassing mercy, prescribed matrimony and ordained it to be a means of salvation and well-being, that it might be a symbol of that divine bond and a sign of that spiritual harmony, heavenly bounty, and celestial favour.

Rejoice, then, O people of Bahá, at this loving harmony that your Lord hath ordained for you from the realms above, and this unity that hath been established upon pillars of divine guidance. From it hath sprung the harmony that hath formed between this blessed leaf and this exalted bough, and the union that hath appeared between this noble fruit and this wondrous branch.

Wherefore, beseech ye God to make this marriage blessed, prosperous, loving, and happy, to gladden and vivify by it their two hearts, and to raise up, through them, souls who will walk steadfastly in the Cause of the Lord, who will diffuse the sweet savours of holiness throughout the East and the West, will illumine the world with the light of divine knowledge, will perfume all regions with the fragrances of divine mysteries, and will adorn the world of being with the hidden secrets of servitude to Him Who is its Creator and Supreme Ordainer. Praise be unto God, both at the beginning of this union and at its culmination.

('Abdu'l-Bahá, from a Tablet—translated from the Arabic) **[6]**

Regarding the question of marriage, know thou that the command of marriage is eternal. It will never be changed or altered. This creation is divine, and it is not possible for that which is created by God to be changed or altered.

('Abdu'l-Bahá, from a Tablet—translated from the Persian) **[7]**

It has been ordained in this Dispensation that unity and love should increase day by day between husband and wife, so that they become one soul, one spirit and one body. I hope that God's purpose will be manifested in the utmost perfection between you.

('Abdu'l-Bahá, from a Tablet—translated from the Persian) **[8]**

Praise be unto Him Who, through His effulgent grace, created the Primal Origin of existence and made It the centre of the seat of glory. From this human Temple, He hath caused to emanate all the tribes, kindreds, and nations of the earth. Whereupon He created all things—whether plants or animals or intelligent and rational beings—in joyous, connected pairs, in order that they might flourish, multiply, and worship their Lord with radiant devotion, treading the path of guidance with heart and soul. Amongst the believers, He hath ordained this binding covenant to be a sign of Divine Unity and the highest means for attaining physical and spiritual union. He hath matched His servants and chosen ones with luminous maidservants and heavenly leaves.... He hath bound together their hearts and made them even as a single soul, that they may, at all times and under all conditions, live in harmony, affection, unity, and concord.

('Abdu'l-Bahá, from a Tablet—translated from the Arabic) **[9]**

O maidservant of God! Praise be unto God that thy loving husband hath entered beneath the shade of the Blessed Tree, and hath received the light of divine guidance from the heavenly sun and luminous moon. He is an agreeable companion and a true friend. Therefore, thou shouldst act in such a manner that he may enjoy the utmost happiness, felicity, and delight and may be wholeheartedly pleased and gladdened. I shall pray for you and hope that, through the bounties and blessings of the Almighty, ye may live in a state of utmost harmony and love. Upon thee be the glory of the Most Glorious.

('Abdu'l-Bahá, from a Tablet—translated from the Persian) **[10]**

Endeavour that the black and the white may gather in one meeting place, and with the utmost love, fraternally associate with each other, so that quarrel and strife may vanish from among the white and the black. Thou must even endeavour that they intermarry. There is no greater means to bring about affection between the white and the black than the influence of the Word of God. Likewise marriage between these two races will wholly destroy and eradicate the root of enmity.

('Abdu'l-Bahá, from a Tablet—translated from the Persian) **[11]**

What the Bahá'ís must do is not commit adultery if they are married, and refrain from sexual intimacy before marriage. It is not a sin in the Bahá'í Faith if you do not marry, but marriage is recommended to the believers by Bahá'u'lláh.

There is no teaching in the Bahá'í Faith that "soul mates" exist. What is meant is that marriage should lead to a profound friendship of spirit, which will endure in the next world, where there is no sex, and no giving and taking in marriage; just the way we should establish with our parents, our children, our brothers and sisters and friends a deep spiritual bond which will be everlasting, and not merely physical bonds of human relationship.

(From a letter dated 4 December 1954 written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer) **[12]**

Creating Families that Illuminate the World

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.

(Bahá'u'lláh, The Kitáb-i-Aqdas, par. 63) **[13]**

And when He desired to manifest grace and beneficence to men, and to 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. He saith, great is His glory: "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."

(Bahá'u'lláh, in *Bahá'í Prayers: A Selection of Prayers Revealed by Bahá'u'lláh, the Báb, and 'Abdu'l-Bahá* (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 2002), p. 116) **[14]**

God testifieth that there is none other God but Him, Who is potent to do whatsoever He willeth. He ruleth over His dominion as He pleaseth. This is a Day wherein the All-Merciful hath enjoined matrimony upon the people that through it may appear those who will lift up their voices and make mention of God, the Lord of the seen and of the unseen, the Lord of the Mighty Throne….

Glory be upon thee and upon the handmaiden with whom We have favoured thee. Render ye thanks unto God, and say: "Magnified art Thou, O Lord of the World! All praise be unto Thee, O Thou Who art the glory of such as have recognized Thee!"

(Bahá'u'lláh, from a Tablet—translated from the Arabic) **[15]**

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.

('Abdu'l-Bahá, *Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá*, par. 88.1) **[16]**

O ye two birds of the celestial gardens! Render thanks unto God that ye were graciously enabled to enter into matrimony with one another and wish to establish a blessed family. I too supplicate the realm of the All-Glorious that those two intimate doves may be made to warble sweet melodies in the heaven of His bounty, so that upon the twigs of the Tree of Life they may sing, in the most wondrous tones, hymns of praise and glory to the Lord of Hosts, in order that all who hearken thereunto may be moved and filled with joy and ecstasy, may be stirred by the breezes of God's loving-kindness, may seek eternal life, and may long for spiritual rebirth. Upon you both be the glory of the Most Glorious.

('Abdu'l-Bahá, from a Tablet—translated from the Persian) **[17]**

It is my fervent hope that, through the bestowals of the Blessed Beauty, this marriage may bring about joy and radiance, and may gladden and cheer the friends—and that through it, a Bahá'í family may shine forth in the realm of existence, the descendants of which will become manifestations of divine grace and bounty in the ages and centuries to come.

('Abdu'l-Bahá, from a Tablet—translated from the Persian) **[18]**

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.

('Abdu'l-Bahá, from a Tablet—translated from the Arabic) **[19]**

I convey my greetings and felicitations on the occasion of thy marriage. May it be blessed and joyous, and may it lead to the continuation of thy lineage forevermore. Every marriage founded upon the utmost steadfastness in the love of God will assuredly become a source of great blessings. Therefore, I beseech God that this marriage may be conducive to happiness and this union may lead to the appearance of divine bestowals. Upon thee be greetings and praise.

('Abdu'l-Bahá, from a Tablet—translated from the Persian) **[20]**

After marriage thou shouldst, God willing, together with thy revered husband diffuse the sweet savours of God so that the confirmations of the Lord of Hosts may continually descend upon you. Through whatever region ye may pass, shed ye the divine bestowals like unto the vernal showers, and render the lands green and verdant thereby. Upon thee be the glory of the Most Glorious.

('Abdu'l-Bahá, from a Tablet—translated from the Persian) **[21]**

The hearts were cheered by your marriage on a blessed and happy day in this glorious age. In the estimation of true believers, there is no doubt whatsoever that this marriage is auspicious and blessed, inasmuch as ye have both sought shelter beneath the Tree of Life, have entered the Ark of Salvation, and have, through the confirmations of the Lord of tokens and signs, been attracted by the sweet savours of the garden of heaven. How blessed is this marriage! How noble is this fellowship and union! Be ye as a pair of doves that nest on the loftiest branches of the Tree of Life within the Paradise of the All-Merciful and warble, in the night season and at the break of dawn, the most wondrous songs in praise of their Lord, the Unconstrained. Verily, I beseech God to ordain for you every good, to quicken you with a pure and goodly life, to assist you to undertake righteous deeds, and to bestow blessings upon your loved ones and your kindred.

('Abdu'l-Bahá, from a Tablet—translated from the Arabic) **[22]**

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) **[23]**

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. Please give them both the Guardian's loving greetings.

(From a letter dated 6 November 1932 written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer) **[24]**

He hastens to wish you both every happiness in your forthcoming marriage, and he hopes that it will not only be a blessing to you both, but to the Faith as well.

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.

Regarding your question of whether Bahá'ís should consider it their duty to have children: As Bahá'u'lláh has stated that the fundamental purpose of marriage is to bring other souls into this world, to serve God and love Him, the Guardian does not believe that you should be unwilling to undertake this responsibility and privilege, even if it should, temporarily at least, interfere with the tempo of your Bahá'í activities.

(From a letter dated 4 August 1943 written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to two believers) **[25]**

You may be assured that in the Bahá'í Teachings, family unity goes far beyond the married couple themselves, and is of critical importance. In the Bahá'í Faith marriage is regarded as both a spiritual and a social institution which affects not only the couple and their children, but also the parents, grandparents, grandchildren and other collateral relations. Indeed, it affects (or, in a healthy society, should affect) all other community associations that surround it.

(From a letter dated 10 July 1996 written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to an individual believer) **[26]**

If the wider society perceives the Bahá'ís as people who are becoming spiritually transformed and who are distinguished by their admirable conduct, and their stable marriage and family life in which children are being brought up with good character and a spiritual orientation, seekers will be attracted magnetically to the Faith and the teaching work will be invigorated.

(From a letter dated 7 July 1999 written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to a National Spiritual Assembly) **[27]**

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 mold 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.

(The Universal House of Justice, Riḍván 2000 message to the Bahá'ís of the World) **[28]**

... the friends, in the many aspects of their individual and collective lives, will need to become ever more shining examples of the change they champion. In the context of the framework for action guiding their efforts for the progress of the Cause, the believers can attend to, among other matters, enhancing the foundations of family life, that vital institution which is the basic unit of society.... In all of this, the friends should be able to determine wisely which aspects of their culture are in conformity with the Teachings and should be advanced and which ones are not, and should be set aside. Important, too, is their ability to contribute to the material and social progress of their communities while being careful to steer away from the pitfalls of partisan politics and all

its polemics. As the lofty ideals of the Faith become more and more manifest in individuals, families, and communities, the believers will foster a gathering of momentum that moves the people of the region closer to that true prosperity which Bahá'u'lláh has purposed.

(From a letter dated 9 July 2015 written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to a National Spiritual Assembly) **[29]**

This generation of youth will form families that secure the foundations of flourishing communities. Through their growing love for Bahá'u'lláh and their personal commitment to the standard to which He summons them will their children imbibe the love of God, "commingled with their mother's milk", and always seek the shelter of His divine law.

(The Universal House of Justice, from a message dated 29 December 2015 to the Conference of the Continental Boards of Counsellors) **[30]**

The Ideal Milieu for Learning the Principles of Consultation

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….

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.

(Bahá'u'lláh, from a Tablet—translated from the Arabic and Persian) **[31]**

In any group, however loving the consultation, there are nevertheless points on which, from time to time, agreement cannot be reached. In a Spiritual Assembly this dilemma is resolved by a majority vote. There can, however, be no majority where only two parties are involved, as in the case of a husband and wife. There are, therefore, 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.

(From a letter dated 28 December 1980 written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to a National Spiritual Assembly) **[32]**

You have asked … for specific rules of conduct to govern the relationships of husbands and wives. This the House of Justice does not wish to do, and it feels that there is already adequate guidance included in the compilation on this subject;[4] for example the principle that the rights of each and all in the family unit must be upheld, and the advice that loving consultation should be the keynote, that all matters should be settled in harmony and love, and 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.

(From a letter dated 16 May 1982 written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to an individual believer) **[33]**

The Universal House of Justice has received your letter of 7 December 1984 expressing the views of your husband concerning the authority that he feels the Writings have bestowed upon the husband in a marriage, and has asked us to convey the following on its behalf.

The guidelines on the subject which have been made available to the friends emphasize that the rights of each and all in the family unit must be upheld, that loving consultation should be the keynote, that all matters should be settled in harmony and love, and that there are times when 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 determine.

(From a letter dated 2 January 1985 written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to an individual believer) **[34]**

The work patterns of both men and women may well change in the future to permit both to participate more readily in professional activity without neglect of family life.

(From a letter dated 11 January 1988 written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to an individual believer) **[35]**

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."...

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 a letter dated 24 January 1993 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. 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;

- the concept of a Bahá'í family, in which the mother is the first educator of the children, and the husband takes primary responsibility for the financial support of his family;

  > 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]**

Among the signs of moral decay in the present social order is the weakening of the spiritual ties that bind the family. Failure within the household to acknowledge the equality of the sexes and to respect the rights of children gives rise to a culture that belittles women and children, condones the imposition of a single will upon others, and opens the way for aggression and violence—first in the family, then at school and work, and eventually in the streets and in society at large. Under such circumstances, the family environment, potentially the ideal milieu for learning the principles of consultation and collective decision making, serves to perpetuate tyranny and oppression in society.

(The Universal House of Justice, from a message dated 24 November 2009 to the Believers in the Cradle of the Faith) **[38]**

Just as the appearance of the rational soul in this realm of existence is made possible through the complex association of countless cells, whose organization in tissues and organs allows for the realization of distinctive capacities, so can civilization be seen as the outcome of a set of interactions among closely integrated, diverse components which have transcended the narrow purpose of tending to their own existence. And just as the viability of every cell and every organ is contingent upon the health of the body as a whole, so should the prosperity of every individual, every family, every people be sought in the well-being of the entire human race….

If the web of relationships alluded to above is to take shape and give rise to a pattern of life distinguished by adherence to the principle of the oneness of humankind, certain foundational concepts must be carefully examined. Most notable among them is the conception of power.… Associated with power in this sense are words such as "release", "encourage", "channel", "guide" and "enable". Power is not a finite entity which is to be "seized" and "jealously guarded"; it constitutes a limitless capacity to transform that resides in the human race as a body.

(The Universal House of Justice, from a message dated 2 March 2013 to the Bahá'ís of Iran) **[39]**

Addressing Challenges

It hath been laid down in the Bayán that marriage is dependent upon the consent of both parties. Desiring to establish love, unity and harmony amidst Our servants, We have conditioned it, once the couple's wish is known, upon the permission of their parents, lest enmity and rancor should arise amongst them. And in this We have yet other purposes. Thus hath Our commandment been ordained.

(Bahá'u'lláh, The Kitáb-i-Aqdas, par. 65) **[40]**

Truly, the Lord loveth union and harmony and abhorreth separation and divorce.

(Bahá'u'lláh, The Kitáb-i-Aqdas, par. 70) **[41]**

Grieve thou not, and sorrow not. Place thy whole trust in God, and hold fast unto the hem of the Almighty. God be praised, thus far hath it been well, and so shall it be again. Verily, thy Lord is the Gracious, the All-Merciful. Strive to the utmost not to separate from the daughter of …, for the one true God desireth harmony, while discord is contrary to His good-pleasure. He desireth union, not division, and wisheth for connection, not separation. The most favourable of all conditions is harmony and love. However, if this is in no wise possible, and complete aversion hath arisen, then separation is permissible. Strive, therefore, with all thy might, for unity, not division.

('Abdu'l-Bahá, from a Tablet—translated from the Persian) **[42]**

O thou dear handmaid of God! Render thanks unto God that the means of reconciliation and fellowship with thine esteemed spouse have been established. The news of thy return to Mr. ... hath made me exceedingly happy, for in the sight of God naught is more beloved than harmony and concord, while nothing is more abhorrent than estrangement and separation. Praised be God that love and harmony have been re-established between you. I was deeply gladdened.

('Abdu'l-Bahá, from a Tablet—translated from the Persian) **[43]**

Formerly in Persia divorce was very easily obtained. Among the people of the past Dispensation a trifling matter would cause divorce. However, as the light of the Kingdom shone forth, souls were quickened by the spirit of Bahá'u'lláh, then they totally eschewed divorce. In Persia now divorce doth not take place among the friends, unless a compelling reason existeth which maketh harmony impossible. Under such rare circumstances some cases of divorce take place.

Now the friends in America must live and conduct themselves in this way. They must strictly refrain from divorce unless something ariseth which compelleth them to separate because of their aversion for each other, in that case with the knowledge of the Spiritual Assembly they may decide to separate. They must then be patient and wait one complete year. If during this year, harmony is not re-established between them, then their divorce may be realized. It should not happen that upon the occurrence of a slight friction or displeasure between husband and wife, the husband would think of union with some other woman, or, God forbid, the wife also think of another husband. This is contrary to the standard of heavenly value and true chastity. The friends of God must so live and conduct themselves, and evince such excellence of character and conduct, as to make others astonished. The love between husband and wife must not be purely physical, nay, rather, it must be spiritual and heavenly. These two souls should be considered as one soul. How difficult it would be to divide a single soul! Nay, great would be the difficulty!

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

('Abdu'l-Bahá, from a Tablet—translated from the Persian) **[44]**

Divorce is, according to the Aqdas, permissible. But it is discouraged. Both the husband and wife have equal right to ask for divorce, and whenever either of them feels it absolutely essential to do so. Divorce becomes valid even if one of the parties refuses to accept it, and after one year of separation, during which period the husband is under the obligation of providing for his wife and children.

(From a letter dated 6 July 1935 written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer) **[45]**

The Guardian has received your letter ... and has learned with deep concern of your family difficulties and troubles. He wishes me to assure you of his fervent prayers on your behalf and on behalf of your dear ones at home, that you may be guided and assisted from on High to compose your differences and to restore complete harmony and fellowship in your midst. While he would urge you to make any sacrifice in order to bring about unity in your family, he wishes you not to feel discouraged if your endeavours do not yield any immediate fruit. You should do your part with absolute faith that in doing so you are fulfilling your duty as a Bahá'í. The rest is assuredly in God's hand.

(From a letter dated 23 July 1937 written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer) **[46]**

The Guardian is in receipt of your letter ... and has learned with deep concern of the state of disharmony existing between you and your husband.

While he wishes me to assure you that he will pray for the solution of your domestic troubles, he would urge you to endeavour, by every means in your power, to compose your differences, and not to allow them to reach such proportions as to lead to your complete and final separation from your husband.

For while, according to the Bahá'í law, divorce is permissible, yet it is highly discouraged, and should be resorted to only when every effort to prevent it has proved to be vain and ineffective.

It is for you, and for Mr. ... as well, to ponder carefully over the spiritual implications which any act of divorce on either part would involve, and, strengthened by the power of faith and confident in the blessings which strict adherence to the principles and laws of Bahá'u'lláh is bound to confer upon every one of His faithful followers, to make a fresh resolve to solve your common difficulties and to restore the harmony, peace and happiness of your family life.

(From a letter dated 11 September 1938 written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer) **[47]**

The situation facing you is admittedly difficult and delicate, but no less grave and indeed vital are the responsibilities which it entails and which, as a faithful and loyal believer, you should conscientiously and thoroughly assume.[5] The Guardian, therefore, while fully alive to the special circumstances of your case, and however profound his sympathy may be for you in this challenging issue with which you are so sadly faced, cannot, in view of the emphatic injunctions contained in the Teachings, either sanction your demand to contract a second marriage while your first wife is still alive and is united with you in the sacred bonds of matrimony, or even suggest or approve that you divorce her just in order to be permitted to marry a new one.

For the Bahá'í Teachings do not only preclude the possibility of bigamy, but also, while permitting divorce, consider it a reprehensible act, which should be resorted to only in exceptional circumstances, and when grave issues are involved, transcending such considerations as physical attraction or sexual compatibility and harmony. 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.

The Guardian will most fervently pray that, inspired and guided by such a divine standard, and strengthened by Bahá'u'lláh's unfailing assistance and confirmations, you may be able to satisfactorily adjust your relations with the persons concerned, and thus reach the one right solution to this assuredly challenging problem of your life.

(From a letter dated 8 May 1939 written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer) **[48]**

... he indeed feels rejoiced at the happy news of the settlement of your domestic differences with Mrs. ... and particularly to know that you have jointly undertaken a most successful teaching tour.... This bond of common service to the Cause which is so closely uniting your hearts and has proved such an effective solution of your personal problems, he hopes, and indeed will fervently pray, will be further cemented by the passing of years and through your increased and joint participation in the teaching work....

(From a letter dated 16 December 1940 written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer) **[49]**

Bahá'u'lláh has laid great emphasis on the sanctity of marriage, and the believers should exert their utmost to create harmony in their homes and a situation which at least is not bad for their children. But if, after prayer and self-sacrificing effort, this proves quite impossible, then they may resort to divorce.

The Guardian will pray for you and your husband that the way may open for you to find a better relationship, and that he may cease to be so violently opposed to the Cause.

He would suggest that in any action separating you from your husband you take into consideration the feelings of your children as well. He will also pray for them, that they may grow up firm in the Faith.

(From a letter dated 10 November 1943 written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer) **[50]**

He feels that you and your wife should do everything in your power to produce a harmonious relationship between you and avoid divorce by all means, if possible. The Bahá'í attitude is that marriage is a very serious and sacred relationship and divorce a last resort to be avoided if humanly possible.

(From a letter dated 10 August 1945 written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer) **[51]**

He was very sorry to hear that you and your husband are still so unhappy together. It is always a source of sorrow in life when married people cannot get on well together, but the Guardian feels that you and your husband, in contemplating divorce, should think of the future of your children and how this major step on your part will influence their lives and happiness.

If you feel the need of advice and consultation he suggests you consult your Local Assembly; your fellow Bahá'ís will surely do all they can to counsel and help you, protect your interests and those of the Cause.

(From a letter dated 16 November 1945 written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer) **[52]**

The Guardian has the impression that your husband is a fine man, and he is very pleased to hear you two are arranging to be reunited. 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 written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer) **[53]**

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 written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to a National Spiritual Assembly) **[54]**

There is no doubt about it that the believers in America, probably unconsciously influenced by the extremely lax morals prevalent and the flippant attitude towards divorce which seems to be increasingly prevailing, do not take divorce seriously enough and do not seem to grasp the fact that although Bahá'u'lláh has permitted it, He has only permitted it as a last resort and strongly condemns it.

The presence of children, as a factor in divorce, cannot be ignored, for surely it places an even greater weight of moral responsibility on the man and wife in considering such a step. Divorce under such circumstances no longer just concerns them and their desires and feelings but also concerns the children's entire future and their own attitude towards marriage.

As to whether you and Mr. ... should now divorce: this is a matter which so intimately concerns you both, your children, and your future that he does not feel he can do more than point out to you what he has stated above. The decision must rest with you both.

(From a letter dated 19 December 1947 written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer) **[55]**

Divorce should be avoided most strictly by the believers, and only under rare and urgent circumstances be resorted to. Modern society is criminally lax as to the sacred nature of marriage, and the believers must combat this trend assiduously.

(From a letter dated 5 January 1948 written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer) **[56]**

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.

He urges you both to devote more of your time to teaching the Cause and to pray together that Bahá'u'lláh may give you a real and lasting love for each other.

(From a letter dated 5 July 1949 written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer) **[57]**

He was very sorry to hear that you are contemplating separation from your husband. As you no doubt know, Bahá'u'lláh considers the marriage bond very sacred; and only under very exceptional and unbearable circumstances is divorce advisable for Bahá'ís.

The Guardian does not tell you that you must not divorce your husband; but he does urge you to consider prayerfully, not only because you are a believer and anxious to obey the laws of God, but also for the sake of the happiness of your children, whether it is not possible for you to rise above the limitations you have felt in your marriage hitherto, and make a go of it together.

We often feel that our happiness lies in a certain direction; and yet, if we have to pay too heavy a price for it in the end we may discover that we have not really purchased either freedom or happiness, but just some new situation of frustration and disillusion.

(From a letter dated 5 April 1951 written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer) **[58]**

He feels that you should by all means make every effort to hold your marriage together, especially for the sake of your children, who, like all children of divorced parents, cannot but suffer from conflicting loyalties, for they are deprived of the blessing of a father and mother in one home, to look after their interests and love them jointly.

Now that you realize that your husband is ill, you should be able to reconcile yourself to the difficulties you have faced with him emotionally, and not take an unforgiving attitude, however much you may suffer.

We know that Bahá'u'lláh has very strongly frowned upon divorce; and it is really incumbent upon the Bahá'ís to make almost a superhuman effort not to allow a Bahá'í marriage to be dissolved.

(From a letter dated 6 March 1953 written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer) **[59]**

He has been very sorry to hear that your marriage seems to have failed utterly. I need not tell you as a Bahá'í that every effort should be made by any Bahá'í to salvage their marriage for the sake of God, rather than for their own sake. In the case of pioneers, it is even more important, because they are before the public eye. However, in such matters it is neither befitting nor right that the Guardian should bring pressure on individuals. He can only appeal to you and ... to try again; but if you cannot rise to this test, that is naturally a personal matter.

(From a letter dated 13 January 1956 written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer) **[60]**

Wherever there is a Bahá'í family, those concerned should by all means do all they can to preserve it, because divorce is strongly condemned in the Teachings, whereas harmony, unity and love are held up as the highest ideals in human relationships. This must always apply to the Bahá'ís, whether they are serving in the pioneering field or not.

(From a letter dated 9 November 1956 written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to a National Spiritual Assembly) **[61]**

If antipathy or resentment develop on the part of either the husband or the wife, divorce is permissible, only after the lapse of one full year.

("Synopsis and Codification of the Laws and Ordinances of the Kitáb-i-Aqdas", in *The Kitáb-i-Aqdas: The Most Holy Book*, item IV.C.2.b.) **[62]**

In considering the problems that you and your wife are experiencing, the House of Justice points out that the unity of your family should take priority over any other consideration. 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) **[63]**

There are a number of Tablets of 'Abdu'l-Bahá addressed to Bahá'ís who had husbands who did not accept the Faith, and in them He encourages the Bahá'í to be patient and understanding and to increase her love and consideration for the husband. This does not mean, of course, that the Bahá'í should in any way renounce her faith, but it may mean a modification of the amount or nature of her Bahá'í activities to ensure that family responsibilities are fully attended to. Quite often a non-Bahá'í husband, although not accepting the Faith, has sufficient affection for his wife and respect for the Faith to assume extra responsibilities in the home so that his wife will have more time for her Bahá'í activities, but she should not insist that he do this, and should always bear in mind that fostering the unity of her family is in itself a Bahá'í duty. The same principles, of course, apply to a husband whose wife is not a Bahá'í.

(From a letter dated 25 January 1979 written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to a National Spiritual Assembly) **[64]**

Your letter ... describing the difficulties confronting your family distressed the Universal House of Justice and we are requested to convey the following to you.

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. You mention your concern over your oldest daughter. It is suggested that you include her and perhaps your younger children in family consultations.

(From a letter dated 24 June 1979 written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to an individual believer) **[65]**

Irreconcilable antipathy arising between the parties to a marriage is not merely a lack of love for one's spouse but an antipathy which cannot be resolved. It is for the Spiritual Assembly to decide whether this condition exists before it sets the date for the beginning of the year of waiting, and this it may do on the application of one of the parties. It is not affected by the other party's not wishing to apply for a divorce.

The date for the beginning of the year of waiting having been fixed, it is the obligation of the parties to make every effort to reconcile their differences and to try to preserve the marriage. The Spiritual Assembly has the obligation to offer them every assistance in this regard....

Obviously, seeking the assistance of one's Spiritual Assembly is a part of the Bahá'í divorce procedure, and the parties concerned should consult with the Assembly about their problems. It is within the discretion of the parties, or either of them, to also avail themselves of professional marriage counsellors.

(From a letter dated 12 July 1979 written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to an individual believer) **[66]**

Your letter of ... to the Universal House of Justice makes clear that you are seeking to re-establish your marriage through study of the Writings and through various modes of consultation and assistance. We are asked to convey its advice on this vital subject of reconciliation of partners in marriage in the context of understanding yourself and your relationship to others.

You are urged to persevere in your studies, in your prayers for resolution of your problems, and in your meditation which may provide guidance and confidence, inasmuch as the understanding of self and of relationships to others are contained in the writings and in the example of the Master, 'Abdu'l-Bahá.

Neither you nor your husband should hesitate to continue consulting professional marriage counsellors, individually and together if possible, and also to take advantage of the supportive counselling which can come from wise and mature friends. Non-Bahá'í counselling can be useful but it is usually necessary to temper it with Bahá'í insight.

You ask how to deal with anger. The House of Justice suggests that you call to mind the admonitions found in our Writings on the need to overlook the shortcomings of others; to forgive and conceal their misdeeds, not to expose their bad qualities, but to search for and affirm their praiseworthy ones, and to endeavor to be always forbearing, patient, and merciful. Such passages as the following extracts from letters written on behalf of the beloved Guardian will be helpful:

> "There are qualities in everyone which we can appreciate and admire, and for which we can love them; and perhaps, if you determine to think only of these qualities which your husband possesses, this will help to improve the situation.... You should turn your thoughts away from the things which upset you, and constantly pray to Bahá'u'lláh to help you. Then you will find how that pure love, enkindled by God, which burns in the soul when we read and study the Teachings, will warm and heal, more than anything else."

> "... Each of us is responsible for one life only, and that is our own. Each of us is immeasurably far from being 'perfect as our heavenly father is perfect' and the task of perfecting our own life and character is one that requires all our attention, our will-power and energy...."
>
> (From a letter dated 17 July 1979 written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to an individual believer) **[67]**

Concerning the definition of the term "aversion" in relation to Bahá'í divorce law, the Universal House of Justice points out that there are no specific "grounds" for Bahá'í divorce such as there are in some codes of civil law. Bahá'í law permits divorce but, as both Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá have made very clear, divorce is abhorred. Thus, from the point of view of the individual believer he should do all he can to refrain from divorce. Bahá'ís should be profoundly aware of the sanctity of marriage and should strive to make their marriages an eternal bond of unity and harmony. This requires effort and sacrifice and wisdom and self-abnegation. A Bahá'í should consider the possibility of divorce only if the situation is intolerable and he or she has a strong aversion to being married to the other partner. This is the standard held up to the individual. It is not a law, but an exhortation. It is a goal to which we should strive.

From the point of view of the Spiritual Assembly, however, the matter is somewhat different. The Spiritual Assembly should always be concerned that the believers in its community are being deepened in their understanding of the Bahá'í concept of marriage, especially the young people, so that the very thought of divorce will be abhorrent to them. When an application for divorce is made to a Spiritual Assembly, its first thought and action should be to reconcile the couple and to ensure that they know the Bahá'í teachings on the matter. God willing, the Assembly will be successful and no year of waiting need be started. However, if the Assembly finds that it is unable to persuade the party concerned to withdraw the application for divorce, it must conclude that, from its point of view, there appears to be an irreconcilable antipathy, and it has no alternative to

setting the date for the beginning of the year of waiting. During the year the couple have the responsibility of attempting to reconcile their differences, and the Assembly has the duty to help them and encourage them. But if the year of waiting comes to an end without reconciliation the Bahá'í divorce must be granted as at the date of the granting of the civil divorce if this has not already taken place.

It can be seen, therefore, that "aversion" is not a specific legal term that needs to be defined. Indeed a number of other terms are used in describing the situation that can lead to divorce in Bahá'í law, such as "antipathy", "resentment", "estrangement", "impossibility of establishing harmony" and "irreconcilability". The texts, however, point out that divorce is strongly condemned, should be viewed as "a last resort" when "rare and urgent circumstances" exist, and that the partner who is the "cause of divorce" will "unquestionably" become the "victim of formidable calamities".

(From a letter dated 3 November 1982 written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to an individual believer) **[68]**

The House of Justice advises you to continue the strenuous efforts you are making to overcome the difficulties in your marriage. It is pleased to note that you and your husband have turned to the Local Spiritual Assembly for guidance and have sought help from a Bahá'í who is a marriage counsellor. Such endeavours, when combined with a strong and determined effort, improve greatly the prospects that your marriage can be maintained. However, it must also be borne in mind that the fact that Bahá'u'lláh has permitted divorce is, no doubt, an indication that in certain circumstances it is unavoidable. If your earnest efforts to maintain your marriage do not yield the desired result, you should not be distraught.

(From a letter dated 28 April 1989 written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to an individual believer) **[69]**

The House of Justice is distressed to learn that you and your husband are continuing to experience marital difficulties. It has frequently advised believers in such situations to turn to the Spiritual Assemblies for advice and counsel, and to follow this advice in their efforts to preserve the unity of their marital relationship. It has been found useful in many instances to also seek the assistance of competent professional marriage counsellors, who can provide useful insights and guidance in the use of constructive measures to bring about a greater degree of unity.

(From a letter dated 17 July 1989 written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to an individual believer) **[70]**

There have been many instances in which a couple has, through a consecrated and determined effort, aided by the power of prayer and the advice of experts, succeeded in overcoming seemingly insuperable obstacles to their reconciliation and in reconstructing a strong foundation for their marriage. There are also innumerable examples of individuals who have been able to effect drastic and enduring changes in their behavior, through drawing on the spiritual powers available by the bounty of God.

(From a letter dated 6 August 1989 written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to an individual believer) **[71]**

... the stress laid in the statements of Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá on love and harmony as the hallmark of marriage, and in view of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's exhortation that each member of the family must uphold the rights of the others, makes it clear that violence in the family is contrary to the spirit of the Faith and a practice to be condemned.

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.

There is no obligation on a wife, who is being subjected to beating by her husband, to continue living with him; she has the freedom to leave him and live in a separate domicile if she feels it necessary to do so.

(From a letter dated 12 April 1990 written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to a National Spiritual Assembly) **[72]**

The House of Justice was saddened to learn about the difficulties you are experiencing in your marriage. It is indeed disheartening to have someone you love become disenchanted with the Faith which you hold so dear. In these circumstances you are advised to consult with your wife to try to establish guidelines that will promote mutual respect for the other's beliefs and ideas, and come to some agreement so that the attitudes and behaviour of each one will not impinge on the other's rights to differing opinions. The marital relationship should not be burdened by one partner's undue expectations in regard to the other, based on beliefs and desires which that other partner does not share. Although sharing of faith is naturally desirable, it sometimes does not occur, and in such circumstances, even greater care and understanding are required to maintain a healthy marriage relationship.

To resign from the Cause would be a dissimulation of faith since you still believe in Bahá'u'lláh; therefore it could have no positive effect on your marriage. To make a compromise of such magnitude would be morally wrong, and rob you not only of your self-respect but also the ultimate respect of your wife. You are strongly urged not to allow her present antagonism to erode your own beliefs nor to lead to an adversarial position toward her. It should still be quite possible for you to maintain a loving and caring relationship with your wife while always keeping intact the integrity of your own belief and your relationship with Bahá'u'lláh. As you rely on prayer and the study of the Holy Writings, you will grow in strength and become better equipped to handle any criticism which may be leveled against you or the Faith.

The fact that your ... children are Bahá'ís should be a source of great comfort to you and also a reason for supreme gratitude to Bahá'u'lláh. He has blessed your life and theirs by granting you the privilege of recognition, and your response in this present difficulty may well be a means of showing the steadfastness of your love for Him. Your challenge is to find that path of service to the Faith which will still preserve the unity of your marriage. You can certainly continue your devotional obligations of prayer and reading of the Holy Writings, you can give to the Fund, participate to the degree possible in the life of the Bahá'í community, and teach the Faith. You are encouraged to exert every effort to reach some agreement with your wife as to the range of activities for each of you which is acceptable as you pursue your respective commitments and interests.

(From a letter dated 1 January 1993 written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to an individual believer) **[73]**

Beyond any professional assistance available to you is, of course, the assistance of God and that assistance one receives from the Faith through prayer, teaching, regular study of the Writings, obeying the ordinances of the Faith, and steadfast perseverance in upholding His Covenant.

(From a letter dated 27 April 1993 written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to an individual believer) **[74]**

Bahá'u'lláh has ordained the family to be a fundamental institution for the organization of society, and has encouraged the believers to build strong and healthy families. This task is not an easy one, and presents a particular type of difficulty when the spouses are of two different religions.

It is the view of the House of Justice that, when differences arise between parents regarding the religious education of children, husband and wife must respect each other's right to educate the children in their respective religions. You mention in your letter that your husband has said that having parents of different religions is confusing for children. This is undoubtedly true but it is a challenge to both parents to gain a deeper understanding of the oneness of all God's revelations. Whether or not the non-Bahá'í partner is willing to make this effort, the Bahá'í partner cannot in good conscience surrender the obligation of sharing the Faith with his or her child. He or she is also enjoined to allow an equal right to the non-Bahá'í spouse. Since you and your husband knew of each other's beliefs before marrying, and as you are both reasonable persons, the House of Justice does not see any reason why such an arrangement should not work.

Your letter suggests that your husband hopes that you will convert to Islam, and it also indicates your own desire that he recognize Bahá'u'lláh. While these attitudes are understandable, they should never become an impediment to the unity of your marriage. Your husband may never come to recognize Bahá'u'lláh. You, for your part, can never deny Him. This should not prevent the two of you from having a good and happy family life. The House of Justice hopes that you will show great love to your husband, that you will pray fervently for him, and that you will be the best of helpmates. If he wishes to be Muslim, you should help him to be an exemplary Muslim. The House of Justice feels that such an attitude will greatly facilitate the ongoing consultations which you need to have with your husband on the topic of your son's religious education.

(From a letter dated 15 November 1993 written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to an individual believer) **[75]**

The question, "Does God ever want divorce?" is one which ought perhaps to be framed differently, since the key point to consider in such cases is not so much a matter of whether God would ever "want" divorce as the practical issue of when it is appropriate for a married couple, or one of the parties to a marriage, to decide to separate. The answer cannot be dispensed simply, because it depends on a variety of factors that need to be considered in the context of a particular, concrete situation.

(From a letter dated 25 October 1995 written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to an individual believer) **[76]**

For the couple themselves, the year of waiting provides a possibility for each party patiently and independently to assess their situation at a distance removed from the aggravating interferences of close proximity and to devise the measures of a fresh approach towards mending the strained relationship. There have been many instances in which a couple has, through a consecrated and determined effort, aided by the power of prayer and the advice of experts, succeeded in overcoming seemingly insuperable obstacles to their reconciliation and in reconstructing a strong foundation for their marriage. There are also innumerable examples of individuals who have been able to effect drastic and enduring changes in their behaviour, through drawing on the spiritual powers available by the bounty of God....

It is clear then that, in the Bahá'í Faith, divorce is strongly discouraged and should be resorted to only when a prolonged effort to effect reconciliation has been unsuccessful. However, it should

also be noted that the fact that Bahá'u'lláh has permitted divorce is, no doubt, an indication that in certain circumstances it is unavoidable. In other words, it is permissible when an irreconcilable antipathy exists between the two parties to a marriage.

(From a letter dated 2 September 1996 written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to an individual believer) **[77]**

The House of Justice deeply sympathizes with you in the difficulties which you have described in your letter, stemming from your husband's history of family violence and drug use. It noted with approval that you have sought professional psychological assistance to address this matter, and is hopeful that your husband will persevere in his efforts to achieve healing and to modify his destructive behaviour. In addition, you are encouraged to approach the local Bahá'í institutions, such as your Local Spiritual Assembly, Auxiliary Board member and/or National Spiritual Assembly, for spiritual support and guidance.

The courage and love with which you have acknowledged this painful situation and are striving to assist your husband are warmly commended. The House of Justice is concerned by your statement that your husband has been mistreating you and that there may be danger of physical violence. It is evident from the Bahá'í teachings that no husband should subject his wife to abuse of any kind, and that such reprehensible action is the antithesis of the relationship of mutual respect and equality enjoined in the Writings—a relationship governed by the principles of consultation and devoid of the use of force to compel obedience to one's will. While a Bahá'í is enjoined to be patient and forbearing, one is not obliged to remain indefinitely in a situation where one is being subjected to abuse. Thus, it may be advisable to seek practical guidance as to what measures you could take to protect yourself from harm if the situation were to deteriorate markedly. The House of Justice deeply hopes it will not come to this, and that you and your dear husband will find the means to repair the foundation of your marriage to establish a framework of cordial unity.

(From a letter dated 16 April 1998 written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to an individual believer) **[78]**

The House of Justice is of the opinion that unhappiness in marriage and in the family is a symptom of a whole range of shortcomings in the way of life followed by most people at this time —shortcomings which are reflected to too great a degree within the Bahá'í community. Paying more attention, and devoting more time, to the choice of a spouse is but one aspect of the solution. Bahá'ís need to study more deeply and carry out more faithfully all the guidance for life and behaviour which is contained in the Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh—including those teachings which relate especially to marriage and the family.

(From a letter dated 18 January 1999 written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to an individual believer) **[79]**

The Bahá'í teachings on the sacredness of the marriage bond and the importance of family unity are clear, and your desire to uphold this principle through your perseverance and dedication to your marriage is praiseworthy. As 'Abdu'l-Bahá tells us, a husband and wife should be "... two helpmates, two intimate friends, who should be concerned about the welfare of each other." Therefore, if your husband is willing to be chaste and faithful in his conduct, the House of Justice encourages you to support and assist him in his efforts to be obedient to the laws of Bahá'u'lláh and committed to his family. The following extract from a letter written on behalf of the beloved Guardian may be helpful.

> There are qualities in everyone which we can appreciate and admire, and for which we can love them; and perhaps, if you determine to think only of these qualities which your husband possesses, this will help to improve the situation.... You should turn your thoughts away from

the things which upset you, and constantly pray to Bahá'u'lláh to help you. Then you will find how that pure love, enkindled by God, which burns in the soul when we read and study the Teachings, will warm and heal, more than anything else.

However, providing assistance and encouragement to your husband should not entail compromising your dignity or integrity as a Bahá'í and a partner in the marriage. Further, it is important to remember that while you can try to help your husband, in the end it is he who is responsible for his own spiritual development.

(From a letter dated 29 September 1999 written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to an individual believer) **[80]**

The depth of the concern you express—and the distress your present situation is causing you—are both readily understandable in the light of the great importance that the Bahá'í teachings attach to the relationship that Bahá'í partners must seek to establish in their marriage. You are doubtless familiar with the words of 'Abdu'l-Bahá on this subject:

> 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.
>
> (*Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá*, section 86)

Inevitably, the struggle to attain so great a goal poses comparable challenges to the patterns of habit and attitude that individuals bring into their married life. In this respect, your personal situation, while intensely painful for you in many of its specifics, is not intrinsically different from that of the rest of humanity. The intimacy of the marriage relationship—and the inescapable demand for self-sacrifice that this relationship always entails—has exposed to you various of your inner weaknesses that would very likely have come to light in no other way. The fact that these shortcomings endanger the most precious tie that can bind one human being to another makes the experience all the more intense.

This very development, however, can be a great blessing, if you are able to see it in this way and respond accordingly. As nothing else in your life has been able to do, the crisis you describe has the capacity to tap the roots of motivation for fundamental change. This is, more often than not, the means that God employs to open us to His Will. In the words of the Master:

> To the sincere ones, tests are as a gift from God, the Exalted, for a heroic person hasteneth, with the utmost joy and gladness, to the tests of a violent battlefield.... Likewise, the pure gold shineth radiantly in the fire of test.... This test is just as thou hast written: it removeth the rust of egotism from the mirror of the heart until the Sun of Truth may shine therein. For, no veil is greater than egotism and no matter how thin that covering may be, yet it will finally veil man entirely and prevent him from receiving a portion from the eternal bounty.
>
> (*Tablets of 'Abdu'l-Bahá*, volume III, pp. 722–3)

The House of Justice urges that, for the time being, you lay all of your entirely understandable concerns about the future of your marriage in the hands of Bahá'u'lláh, detaching yourself as fully as possible from the immediate focus of your concern, so that you can turn your attention wholeheartedly to the opportunity now presented to you to nurture those undeveloped qualities within you whose mature expression the circumstances of your life so urgently call for. You will want to advise your wife of the decision you have made and seek her own prayers for your confirmation in it.

You are indeed blessed to have come to the point in your life where you are able candidly to admit to yourself your failings. Having done so, it will be equally important that you do not dwell on your shortcomings themselves since, as Bahá'u'lláh makes clear, "abasement" is in no way

conducive to spiritual growth. Your attention and your prayers should be resolutely concentrated on the power of Bahá'u'lláh to help you find new ways to respond to life.

(From a letter dated 4 September 2000 written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to an individual believer) **[81]**

It is clear from the problems you have described that there is a need for sympathetic communication between you and your husband. This can be achieved through love and respect for each other and patient understanding. Our Bahá'í teachings concerning marriage also underscore the importance of tenderness between husband and wife. Consultation provides a means through which these qualities can be practiced to great advantage, and it is hoped that you will find a way to engage in such consultation with your husband.

(From a letter dated 6 May 2001 written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to an individual believer) **[82]**

There is no objection to a couple being separated for a period of time without asking for the year of patience to be set.

(From a letter dated 31 July 2002 written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to an individual believer) **[83]**

Differences of attitude often arise in a marriage and have to be worked out if the marriage is to flourish. This is so whether the partners are of the same or different religions.

(From a letter dated 4 October 2004 written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to an individual believer) **[84]**

It is clearly evident from the Bahá'í Teachings 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.

Whether or not you should divorce your husband depends entirely on your own feelings and judgment in the matter. While the Teachings condemn divorce and urge the preservation of marriage, they do acknowledge the necessity of divorce in extreme circumstances. A believer should consider the possibility of divorce only if the situation is intolerable and he or she has a strong aversion to being married to the other partner.

(From a letter dated 11 November 2004 written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to an individual believer) **[85]**

Your desire to consult with your Local Spiritual Assembly in an effort to find a solution to your marital problems reflects your willingness to take advantage of the divine arrangement ordained by Bahá'u'lláh for attending to matters affecting the life of members of His community. However, if your wife is opposed to this action, and you are unable through appeals to her to change her mind, it may be best to attempt to find another approach towards finding a resolution to these difficulties. Perhaps there are wise believers in the community whose judgment she may trust and she would be agreeable to join you in consulting with one or two of these individuals; or she may prefer that you see a professional counsellor with expertise in dealing with marital issues.

In situations of this kind, it is often very challenging for partners to consult with each other, but it is unhealthy for both if serious conflicts are left unresolved. See whether you can, after prayer and meditation, attempt again to convey to your wife the deep need you feel for a fuller

consultation on your issues, and seek her suggestion as to how she feels an approach to a solution should be made, and attempt to win her agreement that you consult with a suitable person, one she may well be able to recommend.

(From a letter dated 14 November 2004 written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to an individual believer) **[86]**

Your letter raises questions about remaining married when a couple is unable to have children and about divorce and marriage to another spouse for the purpose of having a family. In response to questions raised by other believers who found themselves unable to have children, the House of Justice has pointed out that the teachings of our Faith indicate that a Bahá'í couple should be willing and open to the possibility of having children; nevertheless, it is recognized that not all couples are physically able to have children. It must be kept in mind that procreation, though the primary purpose, is not the sole purpose of marriage, and a couple unable to have children of their own should not feel any guilt of failure, for they can find fulfilment in their lives through other avenues of service to God and humanity and through the enduring unity they establish in their marital relationship.

The House of Justice points out that one cannot fathom the wisdom of God. Many times that which the heart desires proves not to be in one's best interests, and many times that which appears as an unbearable test proves in time to be a path to great happiness.

You should also bear in mind that, in the teachings of the Faith, adopting a child is held to be a highly meritorious act. The passages provided below from the Kitáb-i-Aqdas and a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi affirm this principle.

> 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 Kitáb-i-Aqdas, paragraph 48)

> It was a pleasure to Shoghi Effendi to receive your letter of May 26th and to hear about your adopted children. This is a truly Bahá'í act especially as it was often lauded both by Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá, and the Guardian trusts that they will grow to become Bahá'í workers, and thus repay your kind generosity.
>
> (20 June 1931 to an individual)
>
> (From a letter dated 27 December 2005 written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to an individual believer) **[87]**

It is also pleasing to note from your letter that both of you have turned to your Local Spiritual Assembly for support and counsel, and you are urged to follow the sound advice that has been offered to you. We must be ever mindful that only through immersion in the ocean of the utterances of the Blessed Beauty and the daily struggle to translate His teachings into reality can we come to a greater understanding of God's will for us and achieve our purpose in life. Forbearance, patience, perseverance, mature consultation and love will assist you both in addressing the challenges that arise in your marriage.

(From a letter dated 16 April 2006 written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to an individual believer) **[88]**

Although the breakdown of a marriage relationship may sometimes be precipitated by one single action, it is often the result of a series of events over an extended period which erode the trust and confidence between the marriage partners. Hence one must exercise caution and restraint in seeking to identify the cause of divorce or to assign responsibility for it exclusively to one of the parties. Rather the effort should more productively be expended on ensuring that the necessary endeavour is made to see whether reconciliation can be effected. Should that not be

possible, one should be aware that, in the Bahá'í teachings, divorce is permissible and provisions are made for it.

(From a letter dated 22 December 2006 written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to an individual believer) **[89]**

The Universal House of Justice has received your email message ... inquiring whether the Bahá'í Writings indicate a believer should rise above a situation of adultery in order to save his or her marriage. We have been asked to convey the following.

To date, nothing has been found in the Writings of the Central Figures of the Faith or letters written by or on behalf of Shoghi Effendi that specifically addresses the question you have raised. However, as you are probably aware, under Bahá'í law, divorce is permissible if antipathy or resentment develop on the part of either the husband or the wife. In this connection, the House of Justice has explained that there are "a large number of possible causes for such an attitude to occur between a married couple, among which is included adultery by one of the marriage partners. It is also possible that, if adultery occurs, a combination of remorse on the part of the marriage partner involved and forgiveness and magnanimity on the part of the other partner could result in a condition in which the marriage could be preserved and divorce avoided."

(From a letter dated 7 December 2016 written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to an individual believer) **[90]**

As to your broader request for guidance regarding how Bahá'í married couples may deal with sexual problems, you are encouraged to consider the following perspectives and principles. One of the outcomes of the rising tide of materialism and consequent reorientation of society, over more than a century, has been a destructive emphasis on sexuality. Sexuality has become a preoccupation, pervading commerce, media, the arts, and popular culture, influencing disciplines such as medicine, psychology, and education, and reducing the human being to an object. It is no longer merely a part of life but has become the defining element of a person's identity. Thus, our civilization has exalted sex and sexuality to a level of importance far beyond its proper place in our lives. Sex has also been wrenched out of its proper context. On the one hand, our current culture suffuses every aspect of our lives with sex, but on the other, it isolates the sex act from its natural corollaries of marital life and the bearing and rearing of children.

You are aware that the Bahá'í Faith recognizes the value of the sex impulse and holds that the institution of marriage has been established as the channel of its rightful expression. In letters written on his behalf, Shoghi Effendi made the following statements: "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." Further, the Bahá'í standard "does not preclude the living of a perfectly normal sex life in its legitimate channel of marriage." With regard to the importance that should be placed on the physical aspect of marriage in comparison to its moral and spiritual aspects, a letter written on behalf of the Guardian stated:

> 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.

Bahá'ís are, understandably, influenced by the forces of society, including contemporary beliefs about sexual practices. As believers come to more deeply understand the principles that

have been set forth in the Bahá'í teachings, they will be able to obtain a more balanced and healthier view of sexual relations within marriage. That itself will help Bahá'í married couples to avoid or to resolve many difficulties in a world with an exaggerated emphasis on, and distorted view of, sex. Of course, a number of sexual problems can well have medical aspects, and in such cases recourse should certainly be had to the best medical assistance. Moreover, a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi explained: "Sex is a very individual matter," and "some people are more passionate by nature than others".

(From a letter dated 17 April 2017 written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to an individual believer) **[91]**

The Universal House of Justice has received your email letter ... requesting guidance and prayers in relation to your marriage, which you describe has been affected by your husband's substance abuse problem....

As to the question of whether a breach of Bahá'í law leading to the breakdown of a marriage justifies divorce, in the Bahá'í writings there are no specific grounds for divorce such as there are in some codes of civil law. A Bahá'í is expected to make a supreme effort to preserve a marriage, but divorce is permitted in Bahá'í law, and in certain situations it may be the only solution. A believer should consider the possibility of divorce only if the situation is intolerable and he or she has a strong aversion to being married to the other partner. Whether your situation is one in which you feel you are justified in applying for divorce is a decision only you can make in light of prayerful consideration of the factors involved.

(From a letter dated 6 December 2017 written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to an individual believer) **[92]**

Prayers

Praised be God, Who hath adorned the heaven of love with the stars of unity and harmony, and hath ordained that in the world of being marriage be the chief instrument for the realization of that which He hath purposed for the peoples and kindreds of the earth. Verily, He hath raised up regions and countries, and hath revealed the arts and sciences, and whatsoever ye witness today or have heard from His learned servants in the past. Exalted be the Lord of Names, He Who hath enjoined marriage as a comfort unto His servants and His people, and as a means for their peace and tranquillity in His dominion. Thus hath it been revealed from the heaven of His sanctity in His Most Holy Book, as well as in His Books and Scriptures in former times and more recently. Verily, potent is He to accomplish His purpose, and He is the One, the Incomparable, the Unconstrained....

O Lord! I beseech Thee by the gentle winds of the dawn of Thy Manifestation, through which Thou hast vivified all created things, and by the outpourings of Thy grace, and by the pearls of the ocean of Thy knowledge and wisdom, to assist him who hath turned unto Thee and through whom Thou hast manifested Thy grace and Thy loving-kindness, and whom Thou hast, as a token of Thy bounty and a sign of Thy grace, favoured with one of Thy maidservants who hath been engaged in serving Thee for a number of years. O Lord, bind them together in Thy name, through which Thou hast subdued the hearts and attracted the souls. Verily, potent art Thou to do as Thou desirest, and in Thy grasp are held the reins of all that are in heaven and on earth. Praised be Thou, O Lord of the worlds and the Desire of all them that have recognized Thee!

(Bahá'u'lláh, from a Tablet—translated from the Arabic) **[93]**

He is God!

O peerless Lord! In Thine almighty wisdom Thou hast enjoined marriage upon the peoples, that the generations of men may succeed one another in this contingent world, and that ever, so

long as the world shall last, they may busy themselves at the Threshold of Thy oneness with servitude and worship, with salutation, adoration and praise. "I have not created spirits and men, but that they should worship me."[6] Wherefore, wed Thou in the heaven of Thy mercy these two birds of the nest of Thy love, and make them the means of attracting perpetual grace; that from the union of these two seas of love a wave of tenderness may surge and cast the pearls of pure and goodly issue on the shore of life. "He hath let loose the two seas, that they meet each other: Between them is a barrier which they overpass not. Which then of the bounties of your Lord will ye deny? From each He bringeth up greater and lesser pearls."[7]

O Thou kind Lord! Make Thou this marriage to bring forth coral and pearls. Thou art verily the All-Powerful, the Most Great, the Ever-Forgiving.

('Abdu'l-Bahá, in *Bahá'í Prayers*, pp. 116–118) **[94]**

O my Lord, O my Lord! These two bright orbs are wedded in Thy love, conjoined in servitude to Thy Holy Threshold, united in ministering to Thy Cause. Make Thou this marriage to be as threading lights of Thine abounding grace, O my Lord, the All-Merciful, and luminous rays of Thy bestowals, O Thou the Beneficent, the Ever-Giving, that there may branch out from this great tree boughs that will grow green and flourishing through the gifts that rain down from Thy clouds of grace.

Verily Thou art the Generous, verily Thou art the Almighty, verily Thou art the Compassionate, the All-Merciful.

('Abdu'l-Bahá, *Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá*, pars. 87.3–87.4) **[95]**

O God, my God! Join in accord these two souls and set firm their feet in eternal love and everlasting union, in order that each of them may be unto the other a bestowal of Thy grace, a token of Thy loving-kindness, and an outpouring from Thy Kingdom of bounty. Bestow upon them pure and goodly offspring who shall stand firm in servitude unto Thee, remain constant in Thy worship, yearn for Thy Kingdom, and be filled with inspiration by Thy Great Announcement. Verily Thou art the Most Bountiful, and verily Thou art the Merciful, the Compassionate.

('Abdu'l-Bahá, from a Tablet—translated from the Arabic) **[96]**

Praise be unto God Who hath adorned the human reality with manifest signs of divine love, and hath illumined all existent beings with the light of attraction, in such wise that they have become harmonized, interconnected, and mutually attracted through the power of heaven. Verily, union, assemblage, marriage, intermingling, association, and integration are the cause of life for all beings, whereas dissolution, separation, dissociation, divorce, and division lead to the death and destruction of created things. God hath created no being but that its existence doth depend upon the association, composition, and intermingling of simple, primal elements—whereas all that God hath decreed of death, destruction, and extinction occurreth by way of the dissolution, separation, dispersion, and dissociation of the principal constituent parts. Whensoever the natures and elements are gathered, joined, paired, and intermingled, a living being or composite entity is formed, fashioned, and brought into existence. And whensoever they dissociate, separate, and disperse, then that being shall deteriorate, decline, and fall from its station of existence within creation.

Thus, God hath made harmony the cause of life, and discord the cause of death, and hath ordained that coupling, union, and mutual attraction between the hearts of the servants and maidservants through the bond of matrimony be the cause of joy and prosperity of both body and soul. "Glory be to Him Who hath created all the pairs, of such things as the earth produceth, and of themselves, and of things beyond their ken."[8] This, verily, is an evidence of His tender mercy, bounty, and grace unto His devoted servants.

We beseech God to make this marriage to be a cause of felicity, advancement, honour, glory, upliftment, and freedom, so that from this servant and handmaiden there may issue forth many souls who will worship God, bow down in adoration before Him, be devoted and sincere in their faith, and arise to render service to Him and to the world of humanity. He, verily, is the Beneficent, the All-Merciful.

O God, my God! Bless Thou the two parties to this marriage, this Thy servant and this Thy handmaiden, both of whom believe in Thy oneness, testify to Thy unity, and are attracted to Thy Kingdom. Ordain for them every good and make their marriage to be a cause of loftiness, honour, perfection, light, and mercy for evermore. Verily, Thou art the All-Bountiful, the Compassionate, and Thou art He Who is loving and kind to His handmaidens and servants.

('Abdu'l-Bahá, from a Tablet—translated from the Arabic) **[97]**

O my Lord and my Hope! Thou hast, through Thy consummate wisdom, enjoined harmony upon Thy creation and prescribed companionship unto the virtuous amongst Thy servants. Thou hast created all things as joined pairs so that through such union Thy purpose may be realized, and through such bonding, joy and gladness may appear. Thou hast, through Thy grace and bounty, conjoined the hearts and souls, so that countenances may shine, even as lamps, with the light of Thy love, and joyful nuptials may occur at every morn and eventide....

Lord! Make these two souls even as one body, one soul, and one heart, intermingling even as water and wine, and as honey and pure milk. Ordain Thou for their offspring every blessing. Advance their station and cause them to be as two luminous signs shining forth from the horizon of love and affection. Verily, Thou art the Unifier, the Supreme Ordainer, the Source of all love, the Most Generous, the Compassionate.

('Abdu'l-Bahá, from a Tablet—translated from the Arabic) **[98]**

Grant, O my Lord, that this marriage may be auspicious, joyous, blessed, and praiseworthy. Strengthen Thou the union and increase the harmony between these two souls, that they may live together in the utmost tranquillity and delight, and may establish a devoted family that believeth in Thee and in Thy signs. Verily, Thou art the All-Bountiful. Verily, Thou art the Almighty, the Omnipotent, the Most Powerful.

('Abdu'l-Bahá, from a Tablet—translated from the Arabic) **[99]**

He is the All-Glorious.

O ye two closely knit and enlightened birds! Praise ye God that in the divine garden, upon the tree of hope, ye have sought shelter within the same nest and are engaged together in extolling and sanctifying the incomparable Lord. Wherefore, lift up the voice of the spirit and sing ye this song of glorification and praise:

O Lord! We are but feeble birds, yet we abide within the shelter of Thy protection. We are lowly fowls dwelling upon the dust, but we seek Thy mighty abode. Broken-winged are we, yet do we yearn to soar unto Thy sublime summits and Thy retreats of celestial glory. Wherefore, bestow upon us Thy favour and grant us Thy strength, that we may acquire wings of felicity, may take flight in this limitless space, and become intimates of Thy Kingdom of Glory. Grant Thou that, through the union of these two unrestrained birds, a flock of the meadows of truth may emerge and soar within the lands of divine unity. Upon you be greetings and praise.

('Abdu'l-Bahá, from a Tablet—translated from the Persian) **[100]**

He is the All-Glorious.

O my God, O my God! This is Thy servant whom Thou hast caused to be related to Thy heavenly Tree and to be born beneath the shade of Thy oneness. Thou didst suckle him at the breast of Thy loving-kindness, and reared him within the embrace of Thy care. Thou didst guide him unto the right path until, through Thy grace and bounty, he attained unto maturity within the shelter of Thy protection. Thou didst lead him to walk in the straight and undeviating Path, cleaving steadfastly unto Thy sure Handle and mighty Cord, in order that he might seek Thy good-pleasure, be content with Thy decree, turn unto Thy heaven, speak forth Thy praise, and manifest the qualities of the favoured and the sincere amongst Thy servants.

Thou hast now favoured him with one of Thy handmaidens and hast wed him to her through Thine endless bounties. Lord, she was an orphan who was nurtured beneath the shade of Thy mercy and reared within the bosom of Thy favours and bestowals. She attained unto maturity within the protective embrace of Thy Covenant and was safeguarded under the watchful eye of Thy loving-kindness and mercy.

O Lord! Unite these two souls through Thy grace, and bind their hearts together through Thy bounty, that they may become even as a single body, a single soul, and a single being, untarnished by antipathy or estrangement, and waxing greater in fidelity and purity with each passing day. Graciously assist them in their servitude to Thy great and sacred Threshold, and vouchsafe unto them Thy blessings and favours. Protect them from every distress and tribulation, from every sickness and sorrow. Thou art, in truth, the All-Bountiful, the Almighty, the Bestower. Verily, Thou art the Most Gracious, the All-Merciful, Whose help is implored by all.

('Abdu'l-Bahá, from a Tablet—translated from the Arabic) **[101]**

O my Lord and my Hope! This Thy servant hath, in obedience to Thy bidding and in fulfilment of Thy laws, wed one of Thy handmaidens in order that they may establish upon Thine earth a family that shall remember Thee amongst Thy creatures, call out in Thy name amidst Thy people, and become distinguished throughout the world for its relationship to Thee and its reliance upon Thee. O Lord! Grant that this marriage may be prosperous, blessed, pleasing, and happy, and make it a cause of harmony and fellowship for evermore. Thou, verily, aidest whomsoever Thou willest. Thou art, in truth, the Most Powerful, the Almighty, the Omnipotent.

('Abdu'l-Bahá, from a Tablet—translated from the Arabic) **[102]**

O Lord, make Thou this marriage to be blessed, prosperous, and happy. Bind these two souls together, and gladden Thou every eye with the fruits that shall come forth from this auspicious occasion. Shelter them both within the sanctuary of Thy care and protection, and guard them with the watchful eye of Thy loving-kindness. Cause them to become signs of Thy remembrance amidst Thy creatures, and lamps of Thy knowledge within the glass of Thy bountiful favour.

O Lord! They are feeble; strengthen them through Thy power. They are lowly; exalt them through Thy might. They are supplicating Thee at the door of Thy oneness and entreating Thee at the threshold of Thy tender mercy. Verily, Thou art the All-Powerful, the All-Mighty, the Bounteous, the Merciful, the Compassionate.

('Abdu'l-Bahá, from a Tablet—translated from the Arabic) **[103]**

O Lord! Grant that this marriage may be blessed and happy. Send down Thy mercy upon them both in order that from them may issue forth noble children who shall turn unto Thy Kingdom of beauty, glorify Thee in their hearts and with their tongues in the world of being, and unravel the mysteries Thou hast deposited in the hearts and souls. Thou, in truth, art the One Who uniteth, bindeth, and joineth together the human race. Thou, verily, art the Bestower, the Compassionate, the Beneficent.

('Abdu'l-Bahá, from a Tablet—translated from the Arabic) **[104]**

O Lord, make Thou this marriage to become a cause of heavenly blessings and a means of enkindlement with the fire of Thy love in the eternal Kingdom. Vouchsafe Thy grace in order that both may be favoured at Thy Holy Threshold and remain firm in Thy love, may advance spiritually with every passing day, and may become two resplendent signs of faith and certitude amongst the people.

('Abdu'l-Bahá, from a Tablet—translated from the Persian) **[105]**

Notes

1 Qur'án 36:36, and cf. 51:49. ↩
2 Qur'án 36:36. ↩
3 Cf. Qur'án 55:17. ↩
4 The "Family Life" compilation, which was sent to all National Spiritual Assemblies in February 1982. An expanded version of the compilation was issued in 2008 and is available on the Bahá'í Reference Library. ↩
5 A believer who, having married his first wife out of compassion, now wished to be permitted to marry a woman with whom he had fallen in love, saying that his wife was agreeable to his taking this second wife. ↩
6 Qur'án 51:56. ↩
7 Qur'án 55:19–22. ↩
8 Qur'án 36:36. ↩

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