

consciousness. Their relationship must be nurtured with the water of loyalty and love.

A pilgrim who visited 'Abdu'l-Bahá reported that the Master spoke to him of marriage, saying: The greatest bond that will unite the hearts of man and wife is faithfulness and loyalty. Both must exercise toward each other the utmost faithfulness and loyalty and not let any trace of jealousy creep between them...

The man and his wife must dedicate their knowledge, their talents, their fortunes, their titles, their bodies, and their spirits, first to Bahá'u'lláh and then to each other. Their thoughts must be lofty, their ideals luminous, their hearts spiritual, and their souls the dawning-places of the rays of the Sun of Reality.... Their hearts must be spacious, as spacious as the Universe of God.[2]

The same pilgrim reports that 'Abdu'l-Bahá said:

You must irrigate continually the tree of your union with the water of love and affection, so that it may remain green and verdant throughout all seasons, producing the most luscious fruits for the healing of nations....

Endeavor as far as you are able to lay the foundation of your love in the very center of your spiritual being, in the very heart of your consciousness, and do not let this foundation of love be shaken in the least.[3]

PREPARATION FOR MARRIAGE

The success or failure of a Bahá'í marriage will depend, in large measure, upon the spiritual development of the two individuals who become husband and wife. This development, the struggle to become the best that one can be, does not begin with marriage, of course. Rather, it is a process which involves the totality of one's experience. The spiritual development of a Bahá'í must be founded upon careful study of the Bahá'í Writing, the spiritualization of one's entire life, and the formation of one's character in accordance with the standard of the Faith.

Chastity is one aspect of this standard which is an important preparation for marriage. The following letter written on the Guardian's behalf to an individual believer explains the Bahá'í teachings on this subject: Briefly stated the Bahá'í conception of sex is based on the belief that chastity should be strictly practiced by both sexes, not only because it is in itself highly commendable ethically, but also due to its being the only way to a happy and successful marital life. Sex relationships of any form outside marriage, are not permissible therefore....

The Bahá'í Faith recognizes the value of the sex impulse, but condemns its illegitimate and improper expressions such as free love, companionate marriage and others, all of which it considers positively harmful to man and to the society in which he lives. The proper use of the sex instinct is the natural right of every individual, and it is precisely for this very purpose that the

institution of marriage has been established. The Bahá'ís do not believe in the suppression of the sex Impulse but in its regulation and control.[4]

Another important aspect of the preparation of a Bahá'í for marriage is the cultivation of friendly and loving relationships with one's own parents. Since a Bahá'í will ask for the consent of his father and mother for marriage, it is important that a sense of love and trust exist between parents and child. In fact, it is precisely for the purpose of bringing families closer together and promoting unity and love that the law of parental consent was established by Bahá'u'lláh. Shoghi Effendi has explained: Bahá'u'lláh has clearly stated that 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 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.[5]

LOVE

"Love" is one of the most over used words in our modern vocabulary. "I love you...I love my puppy...I love apple pie...I love roller skating...I love horror movies..." These are phrases that we hear several times a day.

The love which becomes a part of marriage must be thought of differently. 'Abdu'l-Bahá has explained that:

...the love which sometimes exists between friends is not (true) love, because it is subject to transmutation; this s merely fascination. As the breeze blows, the slender trees yield. If the wind is in the East the tree leans to the West, and if the wind turns to the West the tree leans to he East. This kind of love is originated by the accidental conditions of life. This is not love, it is merely acquaintanceship; it is subject to change.

Today you will see two souls apparently in close friendship; tomorrow all this may be changes. Yesterday they were ready to die for one another, today they shun one another's society! This is not love; it is the yielding of hearts to the accidents of life. When that which has caused this 'love' to exist passes, the love passes also; this is not in reality love.[6]

Of course, love takes many forms and has many meanings. Everyone yearns to capture the joy of life. Love is elusive, yet it possesses a mystique that is felt by all. It is a blending of affection, ardor, sympathy, fondness, understanding, concern, adoration, consideration, warmth of feeling, respect and much more.

In Bahá'í marriage, love will be expressed both spiritually and physically, for both aspects of love are essential to a good and enduring relationship. As 'Abdu'l-Bahá has stated: In true Bahá'í marriage the two parties must become fully united both spiritually and physically, so that they may attain eternal union throughout all the worlds of God, and improve the spiritual life of each other. This is Bahá'í matrimony.

Among the majority of the people marriage consists of physical relationship and this union and relationship is temporary for at the end physical separation is destined and ordained. But the marriage of the people of Bahá must consist of both physical and spiritual relationship for both of them are intoxicated with the wine of one cup, are attracted by the one Peerless Countenance, are quickened with one Life and are illumined with one Light. This is the spiritual relationship and everlasting union. Likewise in the physical world they are bound together with strong and unbreakable ties.

When relationship, union and concord exist between the two from a physical and spiritual standpoint, that is the real union...But if the union is merely from the physical point of view, unquestionably it is temporal and at the end separation is inevitable.[7]

True love, deep love, implies spiritual unity: The love which exists between the hearts of believers is prompted by the ideal of the unity of spirits. This love is attained through the knowledge of God, so that men see the Divine Love reflected in the soul, and finding this point of similarity, they are attracted to one another in love.... This love will bring the realization of true accord, the foundation of real unity.[8]

And, 'Abdu'l-Bahá has explained that "Real love is impossible unless one turn his face towards God and be attracted to His Beauty." [9] Therefore, the love between husband and wife must be expressed on three levels: the physical, the intellectual, and the spiritual. All these are essential for a strong and lasting union.

SELECTION OF A LIFE PARTNER

Naturally, the selection of a mate is an important step in building a good marriage. During the courtship, the man and woman must make every effort to become well acquainted with one another's character. They must communicate honestly and openly. They must study and seek to understand one another's personality, disposition, background, education, lifestyle, habits, tastes, hobbies, capacities, and aspirations.

It is important that physical attraction not become the only focus of energy and thought. After all, sooner or later the excitement and passion of "falling in love" must give way to a more practical and stable bond. A couple considering marriage must feel certain that they will be able to find a basis for a permanent relationship.

One way to learn about one another is to share a wide variety of experiences under different circumstances and in different surroundings. In addition to Bahá'í activities, visit an art gallery, go for a walk in the country, organize a picnic, plan a dinner party, go shopping together, visit the elderly and the sick. Do other things together. By sharing these activities you will learn important things about your intended spouse.

Remember that marriage is a twenty-four hour arrangement. You will see your husband or wife, not only dressed up and on best behavior for a date, but also

under more trying circumstances. How does your fiancé express anger? How does he or she react to frustration, or disappointment, or other pressures? How does your future mate behave around children? Around your friends? Around people of different races and religions?

Since each of us is, at least partially, a product of family upbringing, we must seek to understand the family of our intended spouse. Visit your future in-laws before the marriage. If possible, spend two or three days in their home. This will certainly give you new insights and awareness, and may even clarify some things for you.

Marriage requires a certain compatibility of tastes and habits. If your lifestyles are very different, there may be trouble ahead. For example, we knew a man who was nocturnal: he worked nights and rarely retired before 2:00 or 3:00 o'clock in the morning. In contrast, his wife loved the daylight and retired around 9:00 o'clock in the evening. Their marriage required constant, difficult adjustments.

A QUESTION TO CONSIDER

Many young people will ask, "How can I maintain the unity of our marriage and still keep my independence?" This is, indeed, a necessary question to consider. To build a good marriage both partners must give up a measure of their independence. This is, of course, a sacrifice. Both husband and wife must sacrifice for the sake of a stronger union. But this is a small price to pay for the bounty of establishing love and unity within a marriage.

POINTS TO REMEMBER AS YOU ENTER MARRIAGE

Be courteous to one another at all times. Courtesy will lend a magic to your marriage. Politeness, thoughtfulness, and consideration will increase your respect and love for one another. Remember to say "Please," "Excuse me," "Thank you," "I beg your pardon," to each other, even in the privacy of your home.

Learn to communicate. A husband and wife must communicate daily. Talk to each other, look at each other; and, listen to each other. Communicate with tenderness, with hugs and kisses. Keep no secrets from one another. Pray and study the Writings together.

Give in to each other. Give in more than 50% of the time. It takes humility and detachment to do it, but learn to give in. Don't simmer with anger, hostility, or resentment. Don't hang on to grudges. Sacrifice for each other. Say to your partner: "I'm sorry," or "I made a mistake," or "I was wrong," or "Please accept my apology."

Resolve never to nag. Nagging causes disharmony, tensions, and grief. Avoid it from the start. Try not to give orders to your mate. Instead of saying, "Go close the window," you could say, "Do you think it's a good idea to shut the window before we leave?"

Always encourage your partner. Give your mate daily encouragement and assistance. Don't let little things bother you. Look at the good, and forget

the other qualities. Strive for forgiveness and magnanimity. Never tear your partner down. Try to develop his or her good qualities.

Reciprocity in marriage. A good marriage requires reciprocity and interaction. And to interact meaningfully one needs time, patience, and a willingness to listen. If you are in a hurry, it is impossible to interact. You cannot always be frantic and rushed and hope to develop your marriage in a spiritual direction. Therefore, arrange some periods of peace and quiet each day.

A husband and wife must plan to enjoy periods of rest, relaxation, and fun together. If possible, plan some kind of recreation each week: walk together, sing, swim, talk, laugh together. Be together- just the two of you.

The challenge of marriage. Bahá'í marriage offers a special challenge. When two dedicated Bahá'ís marry they both naturally want to serve the Faith: teach and become involved in the administrative work of the Cause. But sometimes, in their desire to serve, they do not face the reality of marriage. Bahá'ís must strive to understand all the many factors that go into making a good marriage. Teaching and administrative service are lofty goals. But equally important is an understanding of the inner meaning of marriage.

Unity in marriage. Unity is the cornerstone of the Bahá'í Faith. The spirit of unity must be applied to every aspect of marriage - emotional, physical, and spiritual. We Bahá'ís seem to talk endlessly about unity of nations, of religions, of races and classes of peoples, but almost never about unity in marriage and in the family.

'Abdu'l-Bahá has written: "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...."[10]

DIVORCE IS CONDEMNED

Bahá'u'lláh, in His Most Holy Book, strongly condemns divorce. In a letter written on his behalf, the Guardian states: Marriage is, in the Aqdas, set forth as a most sacred and binding tie, and the Bahá'ís should realize that divorce is viewed as a last resort, to be avoided at all costs if possible and not to be lightly granted.[11]

Young Bahá'ís must take these words very seriously. They should resolve to build sound and permanent marriages so that, within the Bahá'í Community, divorce will come to be looked upon as something to be avoided and shunned.

IDEAL MARRIAGE

In the ideal marriage, both husband and wife will engage joyfully in teaching and in other aspects of Bahá'í service. As a team they will serve the Faith. In their home they will share the chores and tasks of housekeeping; they will

guide and train their children together. Their home will become a haven of rest and hospitality. And through the unity of their family, all will glimpse the future unity of mankind.

Gradually, Bahá'ís will master the techniques required to build strong and enduring marriages. When each partner develops spiritually, acquires a good character, and understands the inner meaning of marriage, recognizing that it is a divine creation, then Bahá'í marriages will become a reality. They will become shining examples of love and joyous association to neighbors, friends, relatives, and to all humanity.

He is God!

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 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 favor in the Kingdom of heaven. But if they do other than this, they will live out their lives in great bitterness, longing at ever 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[12]

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